

March 1, 2017

TO: Members of the Education Committee

FROM: Tracey Madden-Hennessey

RE: Testimony

Esteemed Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey, Associate Director at the YWCA New Britain, and I am here to address Bill SB 912 (AN ACT CONCERNING REVISIONS TO THE STAFF QUALIFICATIONS REQUIREMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS) and HB 7155 AN ACT REQUIRING THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TO DEVELOP A PROPOSED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR COMPENSATION SCHEDULE.)

My organization is one of the larger early childhood programs in New Britain serving more than 220 children, infant-age 5. We are one of New Britain's state supported and accredited School Readiness Providers. Our mission is to support young children in our community by providing a high quality early education experience and ensure that the children in our program are prepared for kindergarten.

A significant number of children in our programs (158) are enrolled with a Care 4 Kids voucher, indicating their families are very low income. In our School Readiness Program alone, 89% of the student population come from families whose income qualifies under government guidelines as very low income. The need for a high quality early childhood education is critical to their future success. Much research has shown that participation in programs such as ours can be a difference maker for low income children's success in the K-12 education system. Programs, like ours, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), are overwhelmingly shown to meet quality standards that are needed to make programs effective.

Essential to our success is the need for high trained early education teachers. Highly skilled teachers are key to programs that look to maintain the rigorous standards needed for NAEYC Accreditation and to graduate young children that have the skills to ensure their success in kindergarten and beyond. Yet, teachers with an Early Childhood Education degree are in short supply. Students at the undergraduate level are discouraged from entering the field given the high expectation and low salary. Only recently, did Central Connecticut State University (our local university) reinstate its Early Childhood degree program after eliminating it several years before. Participation remains small. Given the limited number of graduates statewide, there are not enough to fill all of the positions in 2020, when regulations require that all teachers have a four-year degree. Many of our teachers with an Associate's Degree struggle to finish their degree making progress toward this requirement slow. Although, we support increasing the professionalism across the field, the expansion of the deeded requirements for teachers is important. We have several highly skilled teachers with 12 credits in early childhood education but with a 4-year degree in something else. Ensuring that they don't have to return to school to earn a Bachelor's Degree in Early Education is both a timesaver for them and preserves their family resources. For our program, the flexibility will help us recruit from a wider pool of candidates and increase the likelihood that we (and programs like ours) will find the professionals they need to meet the 2020 regulatory expectation. In addition, provisions to

make it easier for individuals earning degrees at accredited four-year schools out-of-state are another tool to help meet the qualification change. Currently, we have highly skilled teachers with extensive experience (both in and out of state) but with degrees from other states who are having to take additional steps to meet the state's School Readiness professional requirements. Creating roadblocks for these staff sets a precedent that discourages other early childhood professionals from making the leap to Connecticut. Reaching across state lines is an economic tool that could benefit programmers and the state as a whole. Early childhood is itself a significant industry in Connecticut employing more than 14400 individuals statewide according to the Early Childhood Workforce Index 2016.

As an early childhood programmer, we see the impact that the current shortage of teachers has on classroom function. Despite recently becoming re-accredited and meeting high standards, there are times when we go for periods operating classrooms with substitutes or with Administrative fill-in's, as the resumes we receive from interested candidates don't have the credentials needed to meet state requirements. This negatively impacts classroom function, hurts children's development, and overall produces poorer results over time. Therefore, we support the changes indicated through the passage of SB 912.

We recognize that this problem is compounded by the limited pay programmers provide to early childhood professionals with a four-year degree. Given the increasing degree requirement and preference for a four-year degree, it is anticipated that we will naturally start seeing higher wages in this industry which benefits the state's economy. However, we are concerned about the impact of HB 7155 without commensurate measures to increase School Readiness (or other government early childhood) funds or without action to re-open Care 4 Kids. Private early childhood programmers are required to operate by funneling funding through its braided streams of support (state grant, Care 4 Kids, parent fees) to its early education services. There simply is no additional funding available to increase professional salaries while meeting all of the other requirements needed to operate. At its inception, the cost of providing services through School Readiness was estimated to be more than \$11,000 per child. With limited state grant dollars, the likely continued closure of the Care 4 Kids voucher system to new families, and the very limited parent fees we receive (for many families it's the lowest limit on the state fee scale of only \$8/week) our reimbursement for School Readiness services fall below this per child cost.

Therefore, authorizing The Office of Early Childhood to set compensation rates outside of the bounds of the cost of operating may make it impossible for many providers to continue to meet the grant's service requirements. This has serious implications for supply if programs withdraw from providing early childhood education. In New Britain, we have yet to reach our community's goal of serving every preschool child in the city. The city's early childhood providers consistently fill their School Readiness and Headstart slots forcing some children onto waiting lists. That situation could get worse. It took New Britain years, and significant state funding, to reach parity with the state for the percent of children receiving early childhood education. For families that can't afford market rate preschool fees, this effort could make our community regress. At a time when the state has been cited for its unequal education efforts, compounding this situation in cities like New Britain is counterproductive.

We appreciate the Legislators attention and continued support of Early Education and look forward to working to resolve these issues in partnership with you and The Office of Early Childhood.