

Testimony of Emilie Montgomery
Executive Director of Early Care and Education, Community Renewal Team
Education Committee Hearing, March 1, 2017

SB 912, HB 7035, and HB 7155

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Emilie Montgomery, and I am the Executive Director of Early Care and Education at the Community Renewal Team. I am here today to offer testimony on several acts related to early childhood education in Connecticut.

CRT is thankful that legislators recognize the shortage of qualified early childhood educators in the state. One factor that contributes to this shortage is that at present, Connecticut requires these educators to have degrees from colleges within the state. However, **SB 912 does not go far enough** in widening the pool. The bill proposes expanding allowable degrees to include a Bachelor's in early childhood education, child study, child development, or human growth and development from any *regionally* accredited institution. Given that educational accreditation from regional agencies is relatively consistent throughout the United States, and the fact that there are not enough qualified early childhood teachers to meet staffing requirements outlined in law, CRT urges legislators to approve educators who meet the degree requirements from *any college in the country* that is accredited by its regional accrediting body.

In the last month alone, CRT interviewed five qualified applicants with degrees from out-of-state institutions. None of them chose to pursue the Early Childhood Teacher Credential that would have been required for them to work in state-funded programs. Considering it generally takes a month to six weeks to fill a vacancy, the children in the classrooms are the ones most impacted by turning away qualified applicants who were educated elsewhere. In a climate of flat or decreased funding in a high-cost-of-living state, we must seek to attract qualified teachers rather than turn them away.

CRT is also supporting HB 7155. It has been long understood in the early childhood education community that teacher salaries are far from commensurate for the work done and services provided. As education requirements for teaching positions are raised, salaries have stagnated, sending the message that early childhood education is somehow a less-than-honorable profession. We support the development of a compensation schedule within the Office of Early Childhood to be based on degree, years of service, and other factors in order to reduce inequality in teachers' salaries. However, it is imperative that such a schedule be preceded by an analysis of the costs to achieve the recommended compensation, and then supported by appropriate increases in funding for programs.

Under current funding, a teacher meeting all educational requirements and working in a state-funded Child Day Care classroom is paid over a dollar less than one working in a state-funded School Readiness classroom, and almost \$3 less than an equally qualified teacher in a federally funded Head Start classroom. Moreover, even the Head Start pay is a fraction of what a preschool teacher earns in the public school system.

CRT's service area covers 40 Connecticut towns and the agency operates 74 classrooms. We see the effects of the wage disparity among our teaching staff. When a vacancy opens up in a Head Start

classroom, teachers in our state-funded classrooms jump at the chance to transfer to that higher-paying position. Finding educators to fill the openings in Child Day Care or School Readiness classrooms is challenging as applicants learn of the starting wage. Many educators from non-profit programs seek positions in a public school or leave the early childhood education profession entirely. This leaves CRT and other agencies struggling to fully staff classrooms.

Turning now to **HB 7035**, **CRT strongly opposes the cuts** to the Care4Kids Program, and respectfully requests that the leaders and members of the Education Committee advocate for \$155 million in funding this fiscal year. This would allow families making up to 50% of the state median income to benefit from the program. While we understand that Governor Malloy was faced with a difficult task when developing his budget, we feel that the cuts made to early childhood education will have a devastating impact on some of the state's most vulnerable citizens.

When the Care4Kids program ran into a deficit due to new regulations imposed with no increase in funding, the state's response was to close the program to most new applicants as of August 1, 2016. Not only are these closures impacting thousands of parents who are attempting to enter the workforce, many families who come up for redetermination within C4K are now faced with the dilemma of finding quality child care without the support of subsidies. Without access to quality programs, these parents must either find cheaper, unregulated, and often poor-quality child care or quit their jobs to stay home and care for young children. As of last month, 10 families had withdrawn children from CRT classrooms due to inability to pay for care without the subsidies. Of CRT families currently enrolled in or waitlisted for the Care4Kids program, 93% are single-parent households. Without access to affordable childcare, many may be forced to reduce their work hours or leave jobs entirely to stay home and care for children. The ripple effect of these cuts will devastate thousands of Connecticut families. For them, C4K funding must be restored.

These acts concerning early childhood education are about more than just balancing a budget. Every dollar spent on providing quality programs for the youngest of our community is an investment in the state's future. Please contact me if you have any additional questions, or if the CRT staff can be of assistance. Thank you.

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Testimony From:

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