Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

Testimony of Merrill Gay on HB 7027

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker and members of the Committee, my name is Merrill Gay and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. We are a statewide membership organization committed to improving outcomes in the areas of learning, health, safety and economic security, for children ages birth to eight.

Two proposals in the Governor's Human Services budget are troubling. The first has to do with Husky (Medicaid) eligibility. The Early Childhood Alliance opposed the reduction of income eligibility for Husky A parents from 155% of the federal poverty level (FPL) down to 138%. You will be told that this just brings Connecticut into line with other states. To that I would just remind you that Connecticut is a relatively high cost of living state. Rent costs a lot more in Connecticut than it does in much of the rest of the country.

This reduction in eligibility would affect 9,500 parents. When parents lose HUSKY coverage there is a strong likelihood that they will not get coverage through the healthcare exchange and will become uninsured. When parents don't have coverage they try not to use the healthcare system. They don't seek preventative care, putting things off until it's really a crisis. This mindset carries over to the way that they use the healthcare system for their children. This is really evident in dental care. When parents lose HUSKY they lose their dental coverage. That means they get out of the habit of having their teeth cleaned regularly and they tend not to take their children to the dentist either.

The second area of concern has to do with the movement of Birth to 3 from the Office of Early Childhood to the Department of Social Services. The Governor's budget book provides no rationale, nor have the DSS administrators who testified given any reasons to explain this move. We at the Early Childhood Alliance worked for years to bring the various functions of state government that serve young children out of their silos and into one agency so that they could be coordinated into a comprehensive system. It seems counter productive, so soon after the Office was created, to start tearing it apart. The real problem with Birth

to 3 is not where it lives, but that we have routinely underfunded it. Birth to 3 early intervention services are a great investment. They help children overcome developmental delays and save school districts millions of dollars in special ed costs each year. We should be working to break down the barriers that keep families from accessing Birth to 3. Prime among these are parent co-pays. We urge you not to dismember the Office of Early Childhood by moving Birth to 3, but instead to provide the funding that Birth to 3 needs at the Office of Early Childhood.