

Testimony of Eileen Gunning Costello, re: Bills 5449 and 5450

Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischman & Representative Lavielle, members of the Education committee.

I am writing to you on behalf of the Danbury School Readiness Council and the programs we serve. We fund 33 classrooms in eleven sites and provide school readiness funding to over 425 children. The Council also oversees professional development for the Greater Danbury area, serving over 1000 children and their families annually. Our programs and our City grant have not had an increase in many years. We cannot afford another cut to an already underfunded programs.

5449 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ALIGNMENT AND MERGING OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM FUNDING STREAMS, ELIGIBILITY, RATES AND POLICIES.

This bill adds infants and toddlers to the mission of the Office of Early Childhood, allows OEC to establish an infant & toddler priority within Care4Kids and would allow the Office to use up to 2% of funds allocated to School Readiness, CDC's, Care4Kids and Nurturing Families for program evaluation

Comment: School Readiness programs have been flat funded for many years. Despite the lack of funds, the programs have had increased costs due to minimum wage increases, health care costs, COLAs and the general increased costs of utilities and other services. It would be unfair to cut them an additional 2 % when many communities have long waiting lists. This cut would translate into less children being served. I would rather see the closing of expansion of the Smart Start program. We should not be expanding programs if we cannot fully fund the ones that we currently offer.

Secondly, the Infant and Toddler spaces becoming a priority for Care 4 Kids means more funding into unlicensed, unregulated care. With the problems that have arisen this past year in that sector, it is unwise to expand our state funds to a service that is not regulated and does not have a minimum standard of quality. The funds would be better spent researching currently funded, accredited and licensed programs that may be able to take Infants and Toddlers into their centers if the state payment is adequate to cover the costs.

5450 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STAFF QUALIFICATIONS REQUIREMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This bill eliminates the BA requirement for state funded early care programs and requires all programs to have classrooms taught by teachers with at least an Associates Degree by 2020.

Comment : I would like to see the Bachelors plus 12 ECE credits return as a viable qualification. In our area of the state, we do not have any students graduating with a Bachelors in ECE. The highest level we have is an Associate's Degree from Naugatuck Valley Community College. We do not have any four year ECE programs in the Danbury area. We do have many students that graduate from Western CT State University with elementary ed degrees, psychology, sociology and other fields that are great teachers and just need to get some experience and education in ECE. These students are a great fit for our programs and are willing to get an additional 12 credits. We accepted these credentials through June of 2015 and I would like to see this degree added back to the list of qualifications accepted by the OEC. If that is not possible, then accepting an Associates is a great option.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

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