

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

Dear Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Sanchez, Senator Bye, Senator Somers, Representative Lavielle and members of the Education Committee:

First, I would like to thank the committee for putting forth this bill and drawing our attention to the difficulties programs are having in meeting the deadlines in the legislation. I do feel strongly, however, that changing the requirement for lead teacher education to cap at an associate's degree is not the best solution.

When I started my career 25 years ago my first position was as a kindergarten teacher in the Bronx in NYC where most of the children grew up in poverty and had no or poor quality preschool experience. I saw first-hand what happens when children enter kindergarten without the skills to succeed. They learn quickly that school is a place where daily they are beaten down, where their inadequacies become what define them, and where success is not part of their reality.

Fast forward 20 years and I transitioned from teaching young children to teaching the teachers of young children. I wanted to make more of an impact, and how better to do that than help create a workforce of qualified teachers who understand the importance of culturally sensitive, anti-bias high quality early childhood education, and have the knowledge and skills to provide it.

This semester I have the privilege of teaching the Capstone course for our bachelor degree students where we discuss current issues and trends in early childhood education. The students are engaged and excited because their education has brought them to a place where they understand the depth and breadth of the issues; they feel empowered because they are earning their bachelor's degrees this June and know they are well-prepared to lead classrooms where high quality is the norm and their strategies are based on what they know to be best practice rooted in theory, research, and experience.

I am not belittling our associate degree students. In 60 credits, with courses in both general education and early childhood education, we provide them with as much knowledge and experience as we can. We cover child development, content areas such as creativity, early language and literacy, math, science, and STEM, as well as social and emotional development. They are involved in field experiences where they observe and assess young children, where they implement experiences and practice a wide array of teaching strategies planned around the needs of the children they are working with. We discuss strategies for engaging families and creating classrooms which are culturally sensitive and respectful of the communities they serve. Sound like a lot? It is. BUT it is impossible to provide them with the true depth and breadth of the competencies we expect them to have in just 60 credits.

Honestly, teaching in an early childhood classroom is as difficult, if not more difficult, than teaching 1st grade (which I did for a few years), yet our elementary school teachers attend programs that usually require more than 120 credits for certification, and our early childhood teachers are expected to know everything they need to know after only 60 credits? It's just not possible.

In between teaching kindergarten and teaching in higher ed I owned a child care center for several years. I understand the seemingly impossible task of hiring and retaining qualified staff, especially in light of the inadequate compensation and benefits we offer them. However, I also strongly believe that it is our job to figure out how to make it work. The children in our classrooms deserve the best we have to offer, and we need to figure out how to create and maintain a system of quality. Reducing education requirements for lead teachers to an associate degree and calling it a day is not the answer. We can do better. We **MUST** do better.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to this important work.

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Cheshire Resident, Parent and Concerned Citizen