



Connecticut Association for Human Services
237 Hamilton Street, Suite 208
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cahs.org

Elsa Núñez, President
James Horan, Chief Executive Officer
860.951.2212
860.951.6511 fax

Testimony before the Education Committee

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H.B. No. 5450 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STAFF QUALIFICATIONS REQUIREMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Boucher, Representative Lavielle and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Liz Fraser, and I am the Policy Manager for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). A statewide nonprofit that works to promote economic success for children and families through policy and program work, CAHS appreciates the opportunity to testify in opposition to H.B. 5450, An Act Concerning the Staff Qualifications Requirement for Early Childhood Education.

First and foremost, we acknowledge and applaud the work of the Education Committee and of Vice Chair Representative Sanchez in raising the issue of early childhood staff qualifications. We appreciate that the intent of HB 5450 is to be pragmatic about the challenges that early childhood education programs have experienced in attracting and retaining staff with the qualifications required by Public Act No. 17-41. CAHS further acknowledges that, at present, many early childhood education providers are not on track to meet the 50/50 bachelor's and associates degree goals for staff qualifications by July 2018, and that even fewer providers are on track to meet the 2020 goal of bachelor's degree qualifications for all classroom staff.

Specifically, we seek to urge the Committee **to push-back the deadlines** for staff qualifications requirements to require that 1) by 2020, at least fifty per cent of staff at early childhood education programs accepting state funds hold at least a bachelor's degree with a concentration in early childhood education from an institution of higher education that is regionally accredited and that remaining classroom staff hold an associate degree with a concentration in early childhood education from an institution of higher education that is regionally accredited; and that 2) by 2025, all of the classroom staff for infant, toddler and preschool early childhood education programs that accept state funds have at least a bachelor's degree with a concentration in early childhood education from an institution of higher education that is regionally accredited.

We understand that the requirement of a bachelor's degree for all infant/toddler and preschool teachers will take some time to meet. However, it is important to keep that goal in place, as it reflects the value we place on the early years, as well as the distinctive skill set needed to understand the nuances of early education and meet the needs of very young children. Early childhood education is no less important than any year of schooling that follows.

Extending the deadlines for bachelor's degree attainment is preferable to settling for only associate degree attainment in our early childhood classrooms. Pushing for greater bachelor's degree attainment by 2025 will

help to professionalize early childhood education, raise the standards for infant, toddler and preschool care and education, and affirm that the state of Connecticut values critical early care and education and the credentials of providers just as much as K-12 education.

The issue of early childhood staff qualifications is complex, and linked with broader issues facing the early childhood education workforce. Low wages and limited benefits within the early childhood care and education sector harm the well-being of educators, and further constitute significant barriers to attracting and retaining skilled employees.^{1,2} With a mean hourly wage of \$12.18 in 2016, childcare workers in Connecticut earned more than the national average of \$11.02, but still fell well below the state's overall average hourly wage of \$27.87.³ There are also pressing equity issues related to educator qualifications and compensation. Nationwide, early childhood educators of color tend to work in settings with lower credential requirements and receive lower compensation in comparison to their white peers.⁴ Educators of color face higher systemic barriers to higher education in addition to experiencing greater compensation and benefit-related challenges, and are more likely to report that the cost of higher education is a primary obstacle to further degree attainment.

Nevertheless, research shows that increasing staff qualifications can positively impact classroom quality and child outcomes; in a meta-analysis of major, large-scale investigations of child care settings conducted in recent years, researchers identified the significant role of bachelor's degrees in cementing best practices and behaviors among early childhood educators that are consistent with high-quality programming, and in subsequently producing better developmental outcomes for children. A longitudinal study National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited and non-accredited centers found that well-educated staff with specialized training in child development, combined with low turnover rates for classroom staff, were related to higher classroom quality in early childhood education and care contexts.⁵ Because high quality education in the critical window of early childhood is vitally important for the development and future outcomes of children,⁶ early childcare educators should be held to the same standards as our elementary, middle, and high school teachers.

With an eye toward the very real challenges experienced by early childhood educators and the need to move toward greater higher education degree attainment to improve care quality and outcomes, CAHS requests that the Committee form a taskforce or a workgroup to investigate and report back to the legislature next session on issues relating to the early childhood workforce, higher education accessibility and affordability,

¹ Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). *Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study*. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley

² Cassidy, D. J., Lower, J. K., Kintner-Duffy, V. L., Hegde, A. V., & Shim, J. (2011). The day-to-day reality of teacher turnover in preschool classrooms: An analysis of classroom context and teacher, director, and parent perspectives. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 25(1), 1-23

³ May 2016 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates Connecticut, Occupational Employment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_ct.htm

⁴ Maki Park and others, "Immigrant and Refugee Workers in the Early Childhood Field: Taking a Closer Look" (Washington: Migrant Policy Institute, 2015), available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-and-refugee-workers-early-childhood-field-taking-closer-look>; authors' analysis of NSECE data. See National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, "National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), 2012," available at <http://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/studies/35519>

⁵ Whitebook, M., Sakai, L., Gerber, E. and Howes, C. 2001. *Then & now: Changes in child care staffing, 1994-2000*, Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce. (ERIC No. ED452984).

⁶ Sawhill, I. V., & Karpilow, Q. (2014). *How Much Could We Improve Children's Life Chances by Intervening Early and Often?. CCF Brief, 54.*

educator compensation, and provider compliance. Building off the work of the Office of Early Childhood and their prior research conducted per the requirements of Sec. 4 of Public Act No. 15-134,⁷ this taskforce could help surface and evaluate potential policy solutions to some of the barriers to greater degree attainment among early childhood educators while providers and staff work toward meeting the extended 2020 and 20205 deadlines.

CAHS appreciates that H.B. No. 5450 attempts to create reachable goals for early childhood educators and providers, and raises an important conversation about educator compensation. However, we cannot support this bill and instead urge the Committee to instead extend the deadlines for bachelor's degree attainment while directing a taskforce to research related issues and potential workaround to ensure that Connecticut continues to push for the highest quality and appropriate compensation in early childhood field. For additional information CAHS's policy priorities or position on this bill, please contact me at efraser@cahs.org.

⁷ A Plan to Assist Early Education State Funded Providers to Degree Attainment and Increased Compensation Required by Sec. 4 of Public Act No. 15-134, http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/OEC_Worforce_Report_Final_2.10.16.pdf