

Education Committee

Public Hearing, March 14, 2018

Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Dr Susan Radway and I am the Director of Riverfront Children's Center and a member of the State Child Development Centers Director's Forum. The State Child Development Centers, established by the Legislature in 1970, serve over 4000 children birth to school age of low and moderate income working families. Riverfront serves children from Groton and New London and other surrounding communities with 96% of the families receiving tuition subsidies and scholarships. We are grateful for the long-term commitment of the Legislature to support quality early care and education. I am here today to testify on two important early childhood bills.

HB 5449 "An Act Concerning the Alignment and Merging of Early Care and Education Program Funding Streams, eligibility, Rates and Policies." I applaud the Office of Early Childhood for including infants and toddlers in their mission and establishing a priority for infants and toddlers in Care4Kids funding. The Office held regional meetings in the fall and the lack of funding for infant and toddlers was identified by parents and providers as a top priority. This bill would help address this critical need.

I support this legislation, with the caution that the proposed 2% funding for OEC operations should not take money away from the direct service program funding streams. In addition, we support giving OEC the authority to set rates to address the low compensation for teachers and would again ask for assurances that the reimbursement rates for slots be increased from current levels and not decreased. Currently the legislature sets the reimbursement rates and not the O. EC

HB 5450 "An Act Concerning the Staff Qualifications Requirement for Early Childhood Education". The bill would eliminate the Bachelor Degree requirement for early childhood teachers in publicly-funded programs. I applaud Representative Sanchez for raising the issue of early-childhood teacher requirements. The bill recognizes that it will be extremely difficult for programs to meet the current 2018 deadline for 50% of teachers having an Associate's degree and 50% with a Bachelor's. The 2020 deadline of all teachers having a Bachelor's degree is also unrealistic given that early-childhood teachers in community-based centers make around \$13-\$15.00 per hour. At current wages these teachers can not afford the cost of any additional higher education.

In addition, proposed Senate bill 183, section 6, "An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education" eliminates the pre-K to third grade certification and substitutes a pre-K to 6<sup>th</sup> grade certification. If this change passes, institutions of higher education will have no incentive to offer degrees in early childhood and the current credentials required will be impossible to obtain. With so many conflicting interests, I would like to recommend that the committee set up a work group including OEC, SDE and Higher Education to review credentials for early childhood teachers. In the interim, move the date for 50-50 Associate/BA degrees out to 2019. Early Childhood Teachers have fought hard over the years to gain stature and professionalism. We are hopeful that the Study Group will develop a reasonable solution to the credential issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you.

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