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Michele Ridolfi O'Neill

**Connecticut Education Association**

Before the Education Committee

**Re:**

**HB 5450: AAC THE STAFF QUALIFICATIONS REQUIREMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Good afternoon Senators Slossberg and Boucher, Representatives Fleischmann and Lavielle, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Michele O'Neill, and I am CEA's Educational Issues Specialist. CEA represents active and retired public school teachers across the state, as well as hundreds of pre-service educators planning to enter the profession. My testimony will address HB 5450 An Act Concerning the Staff Qualifications Requirements for Early Childhood Education.

Research shows that 80% of a child's brain development occurs before the age of five, which poises our early childhood educators to have an incredibly significant impact on our youngest learners. CEA is therefore not in favor of lowering the degree requirement in new Section 2 (B) of HB 5450 to an associate degree, and supports the aspiration of moving towards an early childhood educator workforce who possess bachelor's degrees. However, in recognition of the problem that could exist for early childhood providers in hiring—and paying commensurate salaries to—qualified teachers, or for existing teachers to obtain the necessary credentials to continue teaching, we request that this deadline for all staff to hold bachelor's degrees be extended rather than the requirements be reduced permanently.

CEA also requests that the 50/50 staff requirement previously included in Section 2, Subsection (B) of CGS 10-16p also be retained in the long term, but allow for a gradual phasing in of the bachelor's requirement.

We understand that some may be requesting a study group be convened to examine workforce and feasibility issues and provide recommendations to the Education Committee next session. We would support such an effort and would ask that if the committee chooses this path, that CEA be included. Requiring bachelor's degrees of our early childhood educators not only requires adequate funding, but it also requires the assistance of higher education institutions, and a study on this topic that includes their perspective would help ensure that preparation programs are ready to meet the needs of students and child care providers.

Thank you for your time today, and your dedication to resolving this important matter.