

**Testimony Supporting Sections 1, 3(c), 8, and 9 of H.B. 5449:
An Act Concerning the Alignment and Merging of Early Care and Education Program
Funding Streams, Eligibility, Rates, and Policies**

**Testimony Opposing H.B. 5450: An Act Concerning the Staff Qualifications Requirement
for Early Childhood Education**

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Education Committee
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Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, Representative Lavielle, and esteemed members of the Education Committee:

My name is Nicole Updegrove, and I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of Sections 1, 3(c), 8, and 9 of H.B. 5449, and testimony in opposition to H.B. 5450.

Testimony Supporting Sections 1, 3(c), 8, and 9 of H.B. 5449

House Bill 5449 would grant the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) greater latitude to meet the needs of our state's youngest children and their families. **We support components of this bill that would facilitate the OEC's ability to serve infants and toddlers and other special populations, to increase per-child provider rates for state-funded child care programs, and to support children and families through school transitions.**

Section 1

Section 1 of H.B. 5449 adds the promotion of service delivery to infants and toddlers to the list of the OEC's core responsibilities. The OEC already coordinates a variety of infant and toddler services, but adding this charge to the OEC's statutory responsibilities underscores the critical importance of supporting childhood development during the earliest years of life.

Section 3(c)

Section 3(c) alters statutory language regarding waitlists for the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy to allow prioritization of the most vulnerable children and families, including households with infants or toddlers. Care 4 Kids needs more funding in order to meet the child care needs of all low-income working families, but given current limited resources, we must prioritize the most vulnerable children and families. In current statute, the Care 4 Kids waitlist must be organized according to existing program priority groups, which are as follows:

- Priority Group 1: families that currently receive TANF and have a parent employed or in a training activity
- Priority Group 2: working families who have received TANF within 5 years of the date of application for Care 4 Kids
- Priority Group 3: teen parents (age 18 or 19) attending high school or high school equivalent
- Priority Group 4: working families with income under 50% of state median income¹

The waitlist does not currently differentiate between households with infants and toddlers, preschool-aged children, or school-aged children. Care 4 Kids is the most significant form of state support for infant and toddler care.² OEC Commissioner David Wilkinson recently testified before the Appropriations Committee that under the current waitlist statutes, infants are essentially born at the back of the Care 4 Kids waitlist.³ Section 3(c) would enable the OEC to prioritize households with infants and toddlers “within and across existing priority groups” on the Care 4 Kids waitlist, helping to ensure that the youngest children obtain quality child care during a critical developmental period.

The waitlist also does not specifically elevate or highlight other particularly vulnerable families. The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule (the federal law dictating use of federal child care subsidy funds) requires that state agencies prioritize the most vulnerable children, including children with special needs, children experiencing homelessness, and children in areas of concentrated poverty and unemployment with insufficient early childhood programs.⁴ These requirements recognize that some children face a heightened need for child care; for example, homelessness can be traumatic for young children and often leaves children vulnerable to further traumas including assault or abrupt separation from caregivers.⁵ Access to child care can help provide safety and educational support to children in need while enabling their parents to work.

Connecticut’s CCDF state plan already outlines some measures that allow Care 4 Kids to better serve these populations,⁶ but these children and families will only benefit once they are admitted off the waitlist onto the program. Section 3(c) would allow the OEC to prioritize these special populations on the waitlist to ensure that they can access the child care they need.

Section 8

Section 8 requires that the OEC review and potentially change per-child provider rates for School Readiness and Child Day Care Center contracts within available appropriations to improve program quality and access. Currently, provider payments for School Readiness slots are capped statutorily at \$8,927 per child per year; Child Day Care Centers receive similar rates. The OEC estimates that providing high-quality center-based preschool costs an average of \$18,910 per child per year; high-quality care for an infant or toddler costs \$24,409 per year.⁷

Without adequate funding, child care providers struggle with the staffing costs, which can comprise 77 percent of the operating cost of running a preschool classroom.⁸ Surveyed providers rate “wages are too low to attract and retain highly qualified staff” as the third-most important issue that the OEC should address.⁹ Research shows that classrooms led by teachers with bachelor’s degrees tend to be of higher quality.¹⁰ Unfortunately, child care directors report that compensation is too low to support teachers in pursuing higher education, and that often after obtaining degrees teachers leave for higher paying jobs in public schools.¹¹ As of January 27, 2018, all qualified staff members hold a relevant bachelor’s degree in only 37 percent of state-funded child care programs.¹²

Ultimately, School Readiness and Child Day Care Centers need more funding to ensure high-quality classrooms for children in need all across Connecticut. In the interim, **enabling the OEC to review and, if necessary, raise provider rates for state-funded early care and education programs can help ensure that Connecticut can attract and retain an adequate number of highly-educated teachers to administer high-quality classrooms.**

Section 9

Section 9 gives the OEC flexibility to use unexpended School Readiness funds to develop two-generational supports to help young children successfully transition into preschool or from preschool to kindergarten. The Office of Early Childhood now leads the state's two-generational initiative in recognition of the importance of family wellness and engagement in young children's success, including and especially during transitions into school.

Testimony Opposing H.B. 5450

Connecticut Voices for Children opposes H.B. 5450, which would lower the required certification for early childhood educators in state-funded classrooms from a bachelor's degree to an associate's degree. As noted above, research shows that teachers with bachelor's degrees or more run higher quality classrooms, including richer language environments and more responsive teacher-child interactions.¹³ Providers have struggled to meet statutory deadlines for degree attainment for a variety of reasons, including low compensation and a shortage of available postsecondary programs offering the requisite degrees, leading to recurring discussions in the legislature about extending deadlines each year. **Connecticut must develop and implement a realistic plan to support early childhood providers' access to higher education without compromising the quality child care all children deserve by lowering the required credentials.**

¹ Long, D and Updegrave N. (2017) "Care 4 Kids in Connecticut: Impact of Program Closure on Children, Parents, and Providers." Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/Care%204%20Kids%20Brief%20-%20TFinal.pdf>.

² In 2016, Child Day Care Centers served 1,340 infants and toddlers, Early Head Start served 1,449, and Care 4 Kids served a monthly average of 7,754 infants and toddlers. Updegrave, N, Ruth, L, and Long D. (2017). "The Changing State of Early Childhood, 2016-2017." Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/changing-state-early-childhood-2016-2017>

³ Wilkinson, D. (2018). Verbal testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee. Hartford, CT.

⁴ D.H.H.S. Administration for Children and Families Office of Child Care. (2016, Dec. 14). "Child Care Development Fund Final Rule Frequently Asked Questions." Retrieved from: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-final-rule-faq>.

⁵ Bassuk E and Friedman S. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network Homelessness and Extreme Poverty Working Group. (2005). "Facts on Trauma and Homeless Children." Retrieved from: http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/promising_practices/Facts_on_Trauma_and_Homeless_Children.pdf.

⁶ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. (2016, June 27). "Connecticut Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Plan with Conditional Approval Letter for FY 2016-2018." Retrieved from: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/occ/connecticut_stplan_pdf_2016.pdf.

⁷ According to research conducted for the Unmet Needs Report, cited in materials for the OEC All Staff Meeting on March 5, 2018, shared with the members of the Early Childhood Caucus on March 12, 2018.

⁸ According to a survey conducted by 2-1-1 Child Care in early 2018, cited in materials for the OEC All Staff Meeting on March 5, 2018, shared with the members of the Early Childhood Caucus on March 12, 2018.

⁹ According to a survey conducted by 2-1-1 Child Care in early 2018, cited in materials for the OEC All Staff Meeting on March 5, 2018, shared with the members of the Early Childhood Caucus on March 12, 2018.

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- ¹⁰ Allen, L and Kelly B. (2015). “Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation.” Retrieved from: <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>. Barnett, W S. (2003). “Better Teachers, Better Preschools: Student Achievement Linked to Teacher Qualifications.” NIEER Preschool Policy Matters, 2. Retrieved from: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED480818>.
- ¹¹ Ongoing subject of discussion in Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance monthly meetings.
- ¹² Office of Early Childhood Workforce Development Unit. (2018). “State-Funded Program Staff Qualifications.” Retrieved on March 13, 2018 from: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?a=4541&q=535848>.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*