

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5449

AN ACT CONCERNING THE ALIGNMENT AND MERGING OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM FUNDING STREAMS, ELIGIBILITY, RATES AND

Title: POLICIES.

Vote Date: 3/23/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/14/2018

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Under HB 5449

Sec. 1 adds to OEC's existing duties: Promoting the delivery of services to infants and toddlers to ensure optimal health, safety and learning of children from birth to three years of age.

Sec. 2 authorizes OEC to use up to \$1 million of the amount appropriated from five different programs to carry out its statutory duties including program evaluation and improvement, interagency coordination and collaboration, and infrastructure, except the office may not expend more than 2% of the amount appropriated to the office for any single program.

Also, OEC would report, by January 1 of each year, to the Education Committee on how it has expended the funds including the results of any evaluations conducted. Secs. 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 make conforming changes for this in the statutes for the specific programs.

Sec. 3 Makes a change to the Care 4 Kids statute regarding waiting list prioritization by adding infants and toddlers and to conform with federal CCDF rules. It makes specific reference to CFR 98.46, which is prioritization for vulnerable children including the homeless and those from families with very low income.

Sec. 8 makes change to School Readiness law by removing the fixed ceiling on the per child cost of \$8,927 and instead authorizing the commissioner to conduct a review of rates for the school readiness program at least once every three years. The review must examine the rates being used in child day care contracts. The commissioner may

establish, within available appropriations, new rates based on the review results, provided the new rates are established to improve program quality and access.

Sec. 9 adds parental engagement and family supports through the two generational initiative to an already existing list of authorized ways the OEC commissioner can use unexpended school readiness funds.

Substitute Language:

The substitute language of HB5449 places the \$1 million limit on the funds that can be used under sec. 2 for evaluation, interagency coordination, and other activities. It also specifies that no more than 2% can come from any one program.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

David Wilkinson, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood:

Wilkinson stipulated that the Office of Early Childhood is setting forth a package of legislative changes to achieve greater coordinated early care and education system as well as better results for children and families. The Department's top priority is to improve access to care for infants and toddlers, being the population with the greatest unmet need for safe, stable and quality-care. He also mentioned that the Office of Early Childhood's mission is to improve its effectiveness and cost efficiency by investing in program evaluation and improvement, interagency coordination and collaboration and infrastructure evaluation up to two percent from state-funded programs. In addition, Wilkinson argued that Section 3 of the bill would amend the Care4Kids wait list language to serve infants and toddlers and to comply with the rules of the federal Child Care Development Fund. He stipulated that current rules disproportionately harms infants and toddlers and may have contributed to the rise of infant deaths in illegal care service centers. On another provision, Wilkinson argued that replacing the School Readiness per-child care cap with a regular rate review of School Readiness and Child Day Care programs—Section 8—would help the Office of Early Childhood to meet economies realities. Furthermore, he defended the bill's Section 9 as a means to achieve long-term success for low-income families. Lastly, he asked for the Committee to consider adding to the bill a provision that would eliminate the reference to "grant" in the School Readiness statutes. He argued that doing so would give the Office of Early Childhood more flexibility to provide services under contracts, tools that may pave the way for greater progress towards its mandate.

Sarah Healy Eagan, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate:

Eagan stated that the Office of the Child Advocate strongly supports the Office of Early Childhood's efforts to improve the safety net and delivery infrastructure for the state's infant and toddlers in need of high quality, safe and nurturing care. She believes that HB 5449 will allow the Office of Early Childhood to make progress in that direction. She urged policy makers to continue their efforts towards increasing opportunities for children's access to high quality, licensed child care, both as a matter of public policy to support improved developmental outcomes for children but also as a key child fatality prevention measure.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Mary Cecchinato, Executive Director of the Torrington Child Care Center and Co-Chair of the State Child Development Centers Director's Forum:

Cecchinato testified on behalf of the Torrington Child Care Center in favor of HB 5449 and made some recommendations. She applauded the bill's inclusion of infants and toddlers in Care4Kids funding. She believes that the two percent funding for the Office of Early Childhood's operations from program funding streams should not take money away from direct services. More so, she asked for assurances that the reimbursement rates for teachers' low compensation that are to be set by the Office of Early Childhood's with this bill, be increased from their current levels and not decreased.

Elizabeth Fraser, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services:

Fraser testified on behalf of the Connecticut Association for Human Services in support of HB 5449 and made recommendations. She stated that the Connecticut Association for Human Services supports the bill in its effort to provide early childhood programs and family services. She applauded the bill's focus on infants and toddlers as well as the proposed prioritization of families with infants and toddlers in the Care4Kids subsidy program. She recommended that the amount of the Care4Kids family subsidy for infant and toddler care be scrutinized and raised. Fraser also stipulated that the Connecticut Association for Human Services supports the bill's provision to retain up to two percent, allowing greater flexibility of movement of funds between programs. However, she also stated that CAHS would be concerned with funds paying outside consultants. Instead, she recommended that additional appropriate funds should be considered for the continued development of the early care system where supplanted funds from program lines should be minimal. Fraser stipulated that CAHS supports the bill's provision according to which rates for the school readiness program will be reviewed by the Commission of Early Childhood at least once every three years and further wishes that creating greater parity in child care contract be as well prioritized.

Merrill Gay, Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance:

Gay testified on behalf of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance in favor of HB 5440 and made some recommendations. She applauded the bill's focus on infants and toddlers, establishing a priority for them in Care4Kids. In addition, she stated that the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance also supports the bill's Section 8 that gives the Office of Early Childhood's authority to review and revise payment rates under the School Readiness and Child Development Center programs. However, she expressed concerns as to Section 2 of the bill, that of using two percent of the appropriation for a number of programs. She stipulated that the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance would rather see the legislature appropriate funds to pay for this evaluation than take it from program funds. She further argued that it would be better to know which programs are really effective and cut those that are not instead, to keep the effective ones intact.

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving:

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving believed the bill to be an opportunity to improve the existing system of financial support for early childhood education by providing effective programs as well as financial flexibility to organizations. As the Foundation recognizes the importance of providing high quality, safe and nurturing environments for young children, it supports the legislation's effort to allow the Office of Early Childhood to prioritize placement of infants, toddlers and children with special needs in Care4Kids. The Foundation also believes that doing so offers the opportunity to engage with families at the beginning of a child's educational track. As to the bill's request to allocate two percent of the Office of Early Childhood's funding to support evaluations for state programs, the Foundation asked that these evaluations measure children's holistic growth and evaluate the impacts of services on

families over the long-term. The spokesperson argued that such evaluations may may pave the way for greater collaboration between the Office of Early Childhood and the State Department of Education. The Foundation asked for support of quality care and livable wages for early childhood teachers. Lastly, the Foundation made recommendations on what an early childhood system-building must include and urged legislators to continue to make long-term investments supporting an early childhood system.

Susan A. Radway, Director of Riverfront Children’s Center, Member of the State Child Development Centers Director’s Forum:

Radway testified on behalf of the Riverfront Children’s Center in favor of HB 5449. She applauded the Office of Early Childhood in their mission to include and make infants and toddlers a priority in Care4Kids funding. In addition, she asserted that she supported the legislation provided that the proposed two percent’s funding of the operations of the Office of Early Childhood from program funding streams should not take money away from direct service. She lastly mentioned that Riverfront Children’s Center supports giving the Office of Early Childhood the authority to set rates to address the low compensation for teachers. Nevertheless, she asked for the Office of Early Childhood to ensure that the reimbursement rates for slots be increased not decreased from its current levels.

Edie Reichard, Director of Sleeping Giant Day Care, Inc. and Co-Chair of the State Funded Child Development Centers Director’s Forum:

Reichard testified on behalf of the Sleping Giant Day Care in favor of HB 5449 and made some recommendations. She applauded the Office of Early Childhood in their mission to include and make infants and toddlers a priority in Care4Kids funding. He further stated that, though he supported the legislation, he also wanted assurances that the proposed two percent funding from program funding streams for the operations of the Office of Early Childhood would not drive money away from direct services. Lastly, he argued that his organization supported the bill’s provision giving the Office of Early Childhood the authority to set rates to address the low compensation for teachers. On that matter, he further asked for assurances that the reimbursement rates for slots be increased from their current levels, not decreased.

Lynn Reichart, Director of Child and Family Agency of Southeastern CT Early Childhood Services and Member of the State Child Development Director’s Forum:

Reichard testified on behalf of the Child and Family Agency of Southeastern CT Early Childhood Services in support of HB 5449 and made recommendations. She firstly congratulated the legislation’s provision according to which the Office of Early Childhood is committed to making infants and toddlers a priority in Care4Kids funding. Secondly, she asserted that with the legislation’s proposed two percent funding from program funding streams for the Office of Early Childhood’s operations, money should not be taken away from direct services. Lastly, to address the low compensation for teachers, Reichart asserted that she was in favor of giving the Office of Early Childhood the authority to set reimbursement rates for slots. Nevertheless, she asked for the rates to be increased from their current levels and not decreased.

Nicole Updegrove, Voices for Children:

Updegrove testified on behalf of Voices for Children in support of HB 5449 and made recommendation. She stated that Voices for Children supports HB 5449 in its effort to meet the needs of Connecticut’s youngest children and their families. She gave reasons why they

supported specific components, namely that of adding infant and toddler services to the Office of Early Childhood's list of responsibility. Additionally, as respect to waitlists for the Care4Kids child care subsidy, she applauded the legislation's provision to allow for the prioritization of the most vulnerable children and families, including households with infants and toddlers. On Section 8 of the bill, Updegrave made the argument that giving the Office of Early Childhood the opportunity to review and raise, if needed, provider rates for programs funded by the state can contribute to retain as well as attract highly-educated teachers to administer classrooms with great potential. Finally, she greatly applauded the legislation's Section 9 in its effort to help young children to successfully transition into preschool or from preschool to kindergarten.

Natalie Vieira, Policy Fellow, All Our Kin:

Vieira testified on behalf of All Our Kin in favor of HB 5449 and made recommendations. She congratulated the bill's language according to which the Office of Early Childhood is committed to delivering services to infants and toddlers and their families. She stipulated that, based on a study conducted by Harvard's Center on the Developing Child, such access to care is critical for the brain development of young children. In addition, she also applauded the bill's initiative to putting infants and toddlers as a priority in Care4Kids funding, especially since she noted that care for infants and toddlers is much more expensive than care for 3-5 year olds. As a conclusive statement, Vieira stated that HB 5445 offers an opportunity for Connecticut to align its early childhood priorities with research on the important need to invest in infants and toddlers.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Eileen Gunning Costello, Danbury School Readiness Council:

Costello testified on behalf of Danbury School Readiness Council in disfavor of HB 5449. She argued that Danbury city's grant has not received an increase for many years where they cannot afford another cut to an already underfunded program. She believes that the Office of Early Childhood should not be expanding programs if OEC cannot fully fund the ones they currently offer. With regards to the Infant and Toddler spaces becoming a priority for Care4Kids, Costello stated that it would be unwise to expand the state's funds to a service that is not regulated and that does not have a minimum standard of quality. She argued that the funds would be better spent researching currently funded, accredited and licensed programs.

Reported by: Adeline Dubout

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