Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is John Cattelan and I am here today on behalf of the Connecticut Alliance of YMCAs. The Alliance represents 21 YMCAs across the state of Connecticut.

I’m here today to comment on Governor Lamont’s proposed state budget as it relates to the Office of Early Childhood. While we appreciate the Governor’s proposed increase for the Care4Kids program, we request that Care4Kids reimbursements increase to 75th percentile of market rate; and that school-readiness funds are increased by $1,000 per child.

Currently our child care centers are reimbursed at the 4th percentile of market rate for infant and toddlers, while our early childcare programs are reimbursed at the 7th percentile of market rate.
During the past 17 years YMCA childcare centers have received one rate increase of three percent for Care4Kids and School Readiness. During that same time, the minimum wage has increased by over 50% and inflation has risen by almost 50% as well.

If you pair the current rates our childcare centers receive, along with the proposed minimum wage increase and Paid Medical Family Leave proposal, the math simply doesn’t work. We will have no other choice then to ask families to pay more for their childcare.

According to the think tank New America, the average cost of childcare in Connecticut was determined to be $19,521, or 28 percent of the median household income. Child care is already unaffordable and without a meaningful increase in reimbursement rates, the state will be making the children care system significantly more expensive.

I also wanted to share with the committee the impact to our summer camps if an adequate rate increase is not approved. We currently have over 30 summer day camps that provide services to thousands of children across Connecticut. Almost 600 of those children attend summer camp with the assistance of the Care4Kids program.
Our YMCA camps receive anywhere $120 to $160 per child for a week of summer camp. The cost of summer camp is twice that amount. Without a rate increase, it will no longer be financially viable for our summer camps to accept children enrolled in Care4Kids. Many of these children will no longer be able to experience the learning and enjoyment of summer camp if our camps do not accept these children.

Summer camp is one of the only available resources for working families with school age children. Once the school year ends, families are left with ten weeks to try to fill with quality consistent child care for their child. For families who cannot combine summer work vacations and childcare by family members, the choices range from undesirable to unacceptable.

Without a rate increase for Care4Kids, what will happen to all of the school age children and their families who depend on this program during the summer?