

Education Committee

Public Hearing, March 6, 2019

Senator McCorry, Senator Berthel, Representative Sanchez, Representative McCarty and Members of the Education Committee.

My name is Carol Smith and I am the Executive Director of the Margaret C. Griffin Child Development Center of Southington, Inc. one of 103 state-funded child development centers serving over 4,000 infants, toddlers and preschool children.

I am submitting testimony in support of the Early Childhood bills raised today to address teacher compensation, tuition forgiveness and expansion of Care4Kids eligibility and reimbursement rates.

All of the bills before you should be viewed as a package to sustain and fairly compensate teachers in the early childhood field who together serve over 244,000 children.

S.B. No. 931 (Raised Bill) Education. ‘An act concerning payments to child care providers’

It is my opinion that the future of the Early Childhood Workforce in Connecticut is in jeopardy. An increase in revenues is needed so that we can pay our teachers a wage that is comparable to public school teachers and one that is based on their education and experience. We are asking for an increase in Care 4 Kids and \$1,000.00 per student in our state reimbursement for Child Development Centers and School Readiness programs. (The \$1000.00 will be used to increase teacher’s salaries.) The increase would enable us to pay teachers more, in hopes that we can attract and retain them as teachers and to provide continuity of care to our children. Research repeatedly shows us that building positive relationships within predictable, consistent care is critical to young children’s development and a mark of quality centers.

S.B. No. 932 (Raised) Education. ‘An act concerning the staff qualifications requirement for early childhood educators.

It is my belief that the dates for the requirement for staff qualifications should be pushed back. The current requirement of 50-50 by 2020 and 100% BA by 2022 is not feasible for two reasons. The first reason is the lack of available qualified staff. I have been at the Child Development Center for 40+ years and have been fortunate to have had the same staff for most of those years. Recently, due to staff retirements, I have had to hire new teachers. This process was an eye-opening and difficult task! It took me 6 months to find a candidate that met the teacher requirements and who was also a kind and nurturing person that I felt comfortable to have with our children. While I was interviewing for a new teacher, a local program, also a state-funded program, was recruiting one of my teachers! This is what we have created in the State of Connecticut, a system where the candidate pool is so limited that centers find it necessary to actively recruit qualified teachers from sister state funded programs.

Secondly, the low wages makes it nearly impossible to attract the best of early childhood teachers. Directors find it necessary to pass up qualified, experienced teachers due to the inability to compensate them.

The present regulation, if it is not changed, will cause many programs to be out of compliance with regulations and potentially lose funding.

S.B. No. 933 (Raised) Education ‘An act expanding eligibility for certain families in Care 4 Kids program.

Care 4 Kids eligibility needs to be increased from 50% state medium to 75% state medium income so that more families can receive subsidies to help with the high cost of care. We need to raise the eligibility to go up to 75% state medium income so that more parents can afford to send their children to licensed facilities and also have enough money to take care of their families.

S.B. No. 934 (Raised) Education. ‘An act expanding eligibility in the Care 4 Kids program to parents enrolled in other types of school.’

I am asking that we open eligibility to Care 4 Kids to parents enrolled in higher education programs. Presently it is only for working parents and students in high school. Supporting young families as they pursue a college degrees and in turn become self-sufficient should be a priority of the Care-4-Kids program,

S.B. No.937 (Raised Bill) Education. ‘An act Concerning a student loan forgiveness program for Early Childhood Educators; to establish a student loan forgiveness program for early childhood educators

I am asking that you support student loan forgiveness for Early Childhood Educators. Given the salaries of early childhood educators, it is evident that teachers are unable to support themselves and pay back student loans.

I am also asking for parity between the Child Development Centers (CDC) and School Readiness Programs (SR). Presently the CDC receive a reimbursement rate of \$8,596.64 and SR rate is \$8,924.00 per child. CDC programs have the same requirements as SR but we get \$327.36 per child less in reimbursement.

Adequate funding for early care and education in all settings will support small businesses, compensate teachers with fair and equitable wages, and improve outcomes for children and working families.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol J. Smith

Executive Director

M. C. Griffin Child Development Center of Southington, Inc.