

Education Committee

Public Hearing, March 6, 2019

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

My name is Mary Cecchinato and I am the Executive Director of Torrington Child Care Center and co-chair of the CDC Director's Forum formally known as (State Funded Directors Forum)

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. I have been a Director for 34 years and appreciate the Education Committee's concern and commitment to early care and education for families and children.

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'

I am very concerned about the future of the Early Childhood workforce. Last year was the first year that I had staff turnover in 33 years. One of our classrooms is on their fourth teacher since February 2018. Two of the teachers left for a public-school position and the third is continuing her degree so she could work in a public school. An increase in revenues is needed so that we can pay our teachers a wage that is comparable to public school teachers. Many state funded programs start their teachers at 13.00 to 14.00 dollars an hour. I have a parent who just started working at a local pet store and her starting hourly wage is \$19.00 an hour which is \$5.00 to \$6.00 more than a teacher working in a preschool. 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 salary.) The increase would enable us to pay teachers more, in hopes that we can retain them as teachers for a long time. This would also give the children continuity of care if teachers remain in our programs for a long period of time. Continuity of care helps children form positive relationships with their teachers and helps them to become lifelong learners.

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

I am asking to push out the dates for the requirement for staff qualifications. Recently I had to hire a new teacher and that teacher due to the requirement of our grant needed to have a Bachelor degree in early childhood education. I advertised and I did receive resumes but many did not qualify. After a long search I was able to hire an employee with her associates. This employee is taking classes to get her bachelor's degree in early childhood but will not finish her degree program until after the present 2020 deadline. The present regulation will cause many programs to be out of compliance with regulations and could 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. A family of 4 making 58,379.00 is at 53% of state medium income and after paying for child care their income drops below 50%. We need to raise the eligibility to go up to 75% state medium income so that parents can afford to send their children to license 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 also 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. If we open it up to parents in school this will help them to complete their education and become self-sufficient.

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 also asking that you look at loan forgiveness for Early Childhood Educators. Many teachers would like to stay in centers, but they do not make enough money to pay their college loans and bills on their salaries. They leave to teach in for the public schools, magnet schools or charter schools.

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 and paper work as SR but we get \$327.36 less in reimbursement.

Given the disparity among publically funded early care and education programs including Magnet Schools, Charter Schools, Smart Start, Head Start, School Readiness and State Funded Child Development Centers; it is imperative for the Office of Early Childhood to review and make recommendations for parity among all programs based on objective criterion.

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,

Mary Cecchinato

Executive Director

Torrington Child Care Center