



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER

VICE CHAIR
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN

MEMBER
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

Dear Chairs Sanchez and McCrory, Vice-chairs, ranking members and esteemed colleagues,

I am pleased to present my testimony in support of several bills before us today focusing on the early years. As Executive Director of the Branford Early Childhood Collaborative (BECC) and member of the Branford School Readiness Council, as you might imagine, I hear often from parents that are struggling to afford childcare. I also hear from teachers that are struggling to make ends meet. Year after year, teachers are not receiving the compensation they deserve to do the important critical work of teaching our youngest learners. We can link better outcomes to quality early childhood experiences. Professor Heckman, an economic policy leader in the field, provides us with leadership on these issues. He says, "The highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible, from birth through age five, in disadvantaged families." His research shows that for every dollar invested in early childhood experiences there is a benefit of \$7-\$10 and is an effective investment in reducing social costs later in life.

Today I am writing in support of Raised Bill 934 ***AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM TO PARENTS ENROLLED IN OTHER TYPES OF SCHOOL***. In my role as a local leader for an early childhood coordinating agency, I can attest to young parents contacting me desperately seeking childcare so they could take advantage of a scholarship they received to attend Gateway College or another local university. I believe expanding opportunities for these parents will open doors for a lifetime of success for the entire family, giving financial stability and lifting them out of a cycle of poverty.

Additionally, I support Raised Bill 937 ***AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS***. At the BECC, I have been providing early childcare provider professional development for more than a decade at no cost to our teachers. Branford is fortunate to have a large number and different types of childcare programs available that fit a variety of needs. The sheer number of programs in one medium sized community is quite impressive. We have seen a changing landscape in Branford with increased investments in tax dollars through public pre-k, state investments with school readiness programs and before and after school programs that work in concert with existing programs. As a rich community of early learning professionals we embrace the opportunity to take advantage of quality learning experiences that are being made available. In fact, the organization I lead provides over 300 hours per year to teachers at no cost.

Bill 937 has support from caregivers in town who have reached out to me about this very issue. They are burdened by high debt and have been trying to keep up with the increasing expectations of early childhood educators. Many of our teachers make less than \$24,000 per year and yet owe tens of thousands of dollars. And many hold more than one job to make ends meet. Until we remedy the chronically underfunded childcare field we must do all we can to make provide a stable field of employment for teachers and the industry.

Thank you for your hard work and consideration in support of these bills.

Sincerely,

Representative Robin Comey