

Testimony Supporting:

S.B. No. 931: An Act Concerning Payments to Child Care Providers

S.B. No. 933: An Act Expanding Eligibility for Certain Families in the Care4Kids Program.

S.B. No. 934: An Act Expanding Eligibility for Certain Families in the Care4Kids Program to Parents enrolled in other types of school.

S.B. No. 935: An Act Requiring the Office of Early Childhood to Develop an Early Childhood Educator Compensation Schedule.

S.B. No. 937: An Act Concerning Student Loan Forgiveness Program for Early Childhood Educators.

H.B. No. 7082: An Act Concerning the Inclusion of African-American Studies in the Public School Curriculum.

H.B. No. 7083: An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies in the Public School Curriculum.

H.B. No. 7250: An Act Concerning the Improvement of Child Development Through Play

Wendy Waithe Simmons, Ph.D.
Education Committee
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Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and the esteemed members of the Education Committee,

My name is Wendy Waithe Simmons and I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. Thank you for this opportunity to voice our support on a number of early childhood bills today.

We believe that our system for early care and education must provide all of the state's children with a first chance at life opportunities. Every child deserves equitable access to early care and education that is high quality regardless of their family's income or where they live. The early years build a foundation for success later in life that only benefits the individual but all of as a community and state.¹ Today, the Education Committee has before it several important bills that bring us closer to establishing equitable opportunities to a caring and nurturing beginning for every child in our state.

Connecticut Voices for Children Supports S.B. 931, S.B. 933, S.B. 934, S.B. 935, and S.B. 937 because collectively they try to address some of the systemic issues that limit access to early childhood quality in our state.

We support, **S.B. 931, S.B. 935, and S.B. 937 because these bills address the gross underpayment of early care and education providers that destabilizes the workforce and contributes to the dearth of childcare seen across the state.** Low compensation among early care and education (ECE) providers has resulted in low retention rates both with programs and with the profession. This a threat to field generally and to local programs specifically. Currently, state-funded early childhood programs (i.e. programs including State-funded centers, School Readiness programs and programs that accept Care4Kids subsidies) struggle to meet a state mandate that all qualified staff members must have bachelor's degree in early childhood. It is

important for ECE staff members to complete a bachelor's degree because we know that teacher quality has a positive relationship with student learning. During the early years, children's brains are rapidly developing and they are building the cognitive skills that create a foundation for future knowledge and skill development. Teachers, in turn must have the knowledge and skills to support children during this critical time in their development. However, this requirement for increased teacher credentials has to be required in a context of improved work conditions including increased wages which are addressed in S.B. 931 and S.B. 936. It is challenging for programs to recruit and retain qualified and dedicated staff members because early childhood educators with a bachelor's degree have the option to earn a higher salary teaching in a public school setting. S.B. 937 specifically addresses the cost of college education among early care and education providers. SB 937 is an opportunity to support the profession to retain educators with bachelor degrees. If we want our youngest citizens to have access to a high quality early childhood experiences in care and in education settings, we must recognize that their teachers are professionals and should be compensated accordingly. Low compensation results in high turnover among teaching staff and leads to lower quality programs, which ultimately impacts our children from our most vulnerable communities.

We support S.B. No. 933 and S.B. No. 934 because it will allow more low and moderately income families who need support for child care access child care while they work or participate in education.

S.B. 933, An Act Expanding Eligibility for Certain Families in the Care4Kids Program, expands the Care4Kids income eligibility criteria to be more aligned to families' real live circumstances. The high cost of child care is a burden for many families. Thousands of families in the labor force² with young children struggle to find affordable options to provide care for their children while working. In 2016, only one in four families in Connecticut could adequately afford child care based on state and federal affordability guidelines.³ Current statute only allows families at 50% State Median Income (SMI) to enroll in the Care4Kids programs. In Connecticut, that is approximately \$57,275 for a family of four.⁴ It is estimated that in Connecticut, a family of four with an infant and a preschool aged child needs an income of \$77,832⁵ just to meet their basic survival needs—a modest apartment, food, insurance, and child care. The high cost of child care is a primary driver of this expense. Increasing family eligibility to 75 percent SMI will allow more families to receive the support that they so desperately need.

S.B. 934, An Act Expanding Eligibility for Certain Families in the Care4Kids Program to Parents Enrolled in Other Types of School, expands Care4Kids eligibility to parents working to advance their education so that they can better provide for their families in the future. Currently, only parents attending high school or those receiving TFA funds and enrolled in an approved DSS or DOL training program can receive Care4Kids funding. S.B. 934 will expand that list to include parents who are enrolled in all institutions of higher education, adult education, English language programs, or other occupational program. As a society, we want families to have upward economic mobility. The current statute perpetuates low income families working in often low paying, low skill jobs without opportunities for advancement. This bill will create opportunities for families to seek self-advancement.

We support H.B. 7082 and H.B. 7083 because both ensure that African American and Puerto Rican students can see themselves in their curriculum and learn about their communities' contributions to the fabric of United States history. African American and Puerto Rican history is American history. If we only teach these perspectives one month of the year (e.g., Black History Month or Hispanic History Month) or during specific periods of time (e.g., civil war or Spanish-American war), we continue to marginalize the experiences and cultures of people who made significant contributions to the United States as we know it. It is important for children to see their race and culture's past reflected in their curriculum so that they know what it possible for themselves. I have friend whose son's teacher told him recently that they there was not enough time to recognize Black History month in their class. It was a micro-aggression that

was painful to him as well as his parents. These statues will ensure that no child will have to hear in the future that his or her cultural is not important enough to learn about in school.

We support H.B. No. 7250 An Act Concerning the Improvement of Child Development Through Play because it is a critical step toward making sure that education is rooted in child development.

As a psychologist, I understand that play is children's work. Through play, children begin to understand their world, test ideas, build friendships, and resolve conflicts. Adult directed activities including physical education contribute to physical wellness but are not substitutes for free play. For this reason, we support structuring the school day to include play as a means of advancing children's holistic learning.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached at wsimmons@ctvoices.org or 203-498-4240 (x 113).

¹ Center on the Developing Child. (2009). Five numbers to remember about early childhood development (Brief). Cambridge: Harvard University. Retrieved from: <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/five-numbers-to-remember-about-early-childhood-development/>

² Connecticut Voices for Children (2018) analysis of 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B17001 and B01001. Poverty is defined by the Census Bureau's poverty thresholds.

³ Ratcliffe, C. & McKernan, S.M. (2012). Child poverty and its lasting consequence. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32756/412659-Child-Povertyand-Its-Lasting-Consequence.PDF>.

⁴ <https://uwc.211ct.org/connecticut-state-median-income-2013/>

⁵ Connecticut United Ways (2018). ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardships in Connecticut. Retrieved from: http://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CT-United-Ways-2018-ALICE-Report-8.13.18_Hires-1.pdf