

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-937

AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM FOR

Title: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS.

Vote Date: 3/15/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/6/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would establish a loan forgiveness program for early child educators. State-funded early childhood programs require all staff members to have a Bachelor's Degree in early childhood. These programs face challenges hiring and retaining quality child care providers as the average salary too low and proves difficult to pay their substantive student loan debts. This inequity between a mandatory degree and stunted wages is driving passionate and dedicated early educators away from this field. Low compensation and high turnover result in low quality programs for children, especially those in vulnerable communities.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood: Commissioner Bye believes a loan forgiveness program would be a great economic development program which would stabilize the workforce. It would incentivize people to complete their degrees and continue to work in the field, while providing financial relief for current educators. However she recognizes that this plan is not reflected in the current budget.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Representative Robin Comey, 102nd District: Rep. Comey strongly supports this bill. She references research from Professor Heckman, an economic policy leader in the field whose research show that investing in early childhood development is an effective investment, turning every dollar invested into a benefit of \$7-\$10. She states S.B. 937 has support from caregivers in her own town of Branford who struggle with salaries less than \$30,000 but owe

tens of thousands of dollars in student loans. She does state, “Until we remedy the chronically underfunded childcare field we must do all we can to provide a stable field of employment for teachers and the industry.”

Izzi Greenberg, Director, Middlesex Coalition for Children: Ms. Greenberg supports this bill, stating that Middletown is increasingly losing quality educators due to low salaries. While she supports the bill, she does acknowledge that this is “an interim strategy, not a long-term solution to achieve appropriate wages and benefits.” She reiterates how important early education is to child development and that providing quality compensation for our early educators ensures the best future for our children.

Subira Gordon, Executive Director of ConnCAN: Ms. Gordon supports this bill and emphasizes the importance of literacy in setting children up for a successful adult life. She states early childhood education is critical in developing basic skills needing for literary growth in later schooling. She says we are undervaluing their contributions and legislation that provides incentives for early educators will ultimately improve conditions for Connecticut’s children.

Wendy Waithe Simmons, Ph.D., Director of Education and Equity, Connecticut Voices for Children: Dr. Simmons supports S.B. 937 and emphasizes the importance of early educators in building cognitive skills that are a foundation in this critical time of development. She emphasizes the importance of a Bachelor’s degree for this type of work as it requires a wide breadth of knowledge and skills. She believes a loan forgiveness program would help retain quality educators in a field which desperately needs them.

The Education Committee received approximately 45 similar pieces of testimony from educators and parents alike supporting S.B. 937. They state 1) Educators face difficulty paying their bills with high student loan debt and low wages, and 2) The importance of early educators for childhood development.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

There was no opposition reported.

Reported by: Garnet McLaughlin

Date: 3/28/19