Testimony to the Education Committee In Support of A Pilot Project for an Early Childhood Incubator Business.

March 6, 2019

Submitted by: Robin Lamott Sparks, Executive Director of the Coalition for New Britain’s Youth

Good afternoon Members of the Education Committee:

I am submitting this testimony to support Raised Bill No. 3873; “An Act concerning the creation of a Pilot Program for an Early Childhood Business Incubator Model.” This unique model not only addresses the existing gaps in high quality infant toddler care, it also is a small business economic development program that would increase the economic self-sufficiency of many of our families (particularly female head of household families).

Since community research and publication of a local Blueprint for New Britain’s Children was published in 2009, we have recognized that the community has a critical shortage of Infant/Toddler early childhood opportunities. Currently, 92% of the city’s children, do not have access to quality childcare in our community. This shortage impacts the ability of adults, particularly women, who are trying to return to the workplace. In New Britain, this is important, as the rate of children in single female headed households is twice that of the state of CT. In some neighborhoods, it’s four times that of the state. Despite multiple discussions and exploration of this issue, the community has come no closer to resolving this gap.

In addition, prior surveys of parents with young children indicated they preferred a home setting over an institutional setting for care of infants and toddlers. More than 60% of New Britain residents rent, making operating a business from home difficult. Many of our families, particularly those with a single head of household, are also low income. Thus the cost of licensing and equipping home space to operate a home daycare is also prohibitive.

Recently, community service providers, school district representatives, and parent representatives have begun talking about a nontraditional approach to address this issue. It is the creation of a hybrid model of care that exists nowhere else in the country. It melds the concept of a Business Incubator with that of Family Daycare. In an early childhood business incubator, private and shared space would allow individuals who want to run their own childcare business, a place to start. The concept also includes training related to business operations and child development. Typically, those who operate out of their home are isolated from others doing this work. An incubator will give providers supportive peers who can share resources, making this arrangement safer.

New Britain partners have been working on this concept for more than a year. In 2018, representatives from our local early childhood coalition submitted the concept for several early childhood innovation awards. We were invited to participate as a finalist for Harvard University’s Zaentz Early Childhood Innovation Prize, winning first place in the concept category. Multiple
investors interested in innovative approaches to addressing early childhood issues have expressed interest in this concept too, however, they are aware current regulations must be addressed to make this project viable.

Given that this model is unique, it does not fit within existing licensing regulations. Proposed Bill 3873 will make the adjustments needed to allow New Britain and several other communities to pilot this project.

We hope that the Connecticut legislature will share our vision and approve this Bill so the work may continue. Thank you for your consideration.