To: Members of The Education Committee

From: Tracey Madden-Hennessey, Associate Director, YWCA New Britain

Esteemed members of the Education Committee:

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey and I am the Associate Director of the YWCA New Britain. I also have a leadership role on New Britain’s Coalition for Youth. I am here to support a variety of bills related to the care and early education of young children.

First, I support SB 930, An Act concerning the creation of a Pilot Program for an Early Childhood Business Incubator Model.” This bill is particularly important to New Britain given the longstanding shortage of Infant/Toddler care in our community. This innovative concept melds a business incubator model with that of family daycare. It exists nowhere else in the country. In 2018, a proposal for this concept received the ZAENTZ EARLY CHILDHOOD INNOVATION PRIZE from HARVARD UNIVERSITY submitted by our Youth Coalition.

This model is viewed as a viable way to address the shortage of care for very young children in communities that also have a shortage of owner occupied housing. Currently, 92% of New Britain’s children under age 3, do not have access to quality childcare in our community. Despite multiple discussions and exploration of this issue over a ten year period, the community has come no closer to resolving this gap.

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.

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.

Community service providers, school district representatives, and parent representatives began talking about this concept in 2017. In our vision for 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.

Given that the concept is new, action must be taken so that pilots testing the concept’s viability can move forward. This legislation, in a limited sense, addresses the regulation needed to bring this concept to fruition. Other states, and funders who support innovation in the early childhood field are watching. With the adoption of this legislation, Connecticut has the opportunity to lead
innovation in a space that supports women’s economic development through job training, while increasing the supply of quality care for the very young.

I am requesting that you support other proposed bill to support families and programs that are providing quality early education:

S.B’s 931, 933 and 934 all address the state’s Care 4 Kids childcare subsidy program. Expansion of Care 4 Kids eligibility for additional families is vital in low income communities like New Britain. Almost 80% of children in the school system are eligible for free and reduced lunch, indicating the high level of poverty. Many are single moms. The YWCA works with Adult Education and Literacy Volunteers to educate and train women for the workforce. Many of them find it difficult to attend school or maintain a job without access to stable quality care. We have also heard many stories from parents already on Care 4 Kids who have turned down salary increases because it is not enough to compensate for the loss of their childcare subsidy.

S.B’s 932, 935, 936, 937 all address compensation and work conditions for professionals in the field of early childhood education. I request that you support efforts to increase salaries for Early Childhood teachers. To increase quality (an effort we support) qualifications for School Readiness Teachers have steadily increased, however, the ability to substantially increase pay has not. As a result, students are not being attracted to the field of Early Childhood and programs are experiencing a shortage of qualified, credentialed professionals. The lack of movement in this area will create a crisis when legislation requiring agencies to hire and populate classrooms with those with a Bachelor’s degree goes into effect. Current funding continues to support pay levels that in many cases make teachers eligible for public programs, like SNAP, TANF and Husky. Without investments in this area, this situation will only get worse.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.