Testimony regarding: S.B. No. 931 AN ACT CONCERNING PAYMENTS TO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Submitted By:
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Good afternoon Sen. McCrory, Rep. Sanchez, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Monica Belyea, and I live in Middletown.

I am honored to be presenting testimony on the issue of S.B. No. 931 AN ACT CONCERNING PAYMENTS TO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS.

This is an issue that is very important to me. I currently serve as the program planner for Opportunity Knocks, Middletown's early health and learning initiative, and have been involved with Opportunity Knocks in a variety of capacities for the past 14 years. I also serve as a co-chair for Middletown's School Readiness Council. I believe deeply in the School Readiness program model, a public-private partnership, that offers families choice in their preschool experience and connects providers to the larger community. In our work with the School Readiness program we are also examining the infant/toddler systems for child care and early education experiences and it's a big worry for our community. Where do our families place their young children for care and how does that impact their children's life long trajectory?

Middletown early care and education providers have continually come to the table as partners with the School Readiness Council and community. They provide high quality experiences, participate in training and data collection, attend work group meetings and try to respond positively to everything the community asks of them. They go above and beyond to provide high quality experiences, to help end preschool expulsions and suspension, to understand our local equity issues. They are being asked to provide all of this yet have never received much of an increase in compensation. They piece together School Readiness and Care 4 Kids subsidies but still aren't really able to cover the cost of care. They struggle to retain staff because they can't offer generous compensation; most can barely offer good compensation. Staff who go on to achieve higher education degrees leave for higher paying jobs.

The Care 4 Kids program is a bear. It's hard to apply for, hard to participate in and hard to accept. However, it supports families in achieving their employment goals. Child care providers have THE most important job in the economy. They should be compensated at least at the level that supports a living wage.
This is an issue that will impact the educational well-being and future of Connecticut’s young children, and requires immediate action. Increasing payments to child care providers through the Care 4 Kids program will help make child care a viable career option. Care providers, early care and education teachers, who are good at this work, who love this work, should be able to make a living doing this most important job.

To make this bill viable, it's extremely important that additional funds be added to the program to maintain the number of families enrolled. It won't help to increase payments and then reduce the number of families who can participate. We saw how that experiment played out when the program was severely restricted a couple of years ago. Child care programs closed in droves because a significant number of families couldn't afford to pay for care. That closes programs to families who can afford to pay as well. It also sends children into unlicensed child care and unknown situations.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify about S.B. No. 931 AN ACT CONCERNING PAYMENTS TO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS. Thank you for your consideration.