
My name is Ingrid Henlon. I am a teacher at Mount Olive Child Development Program in Hartford, Connecticut. For the past twenty seven years, I have had the privilege of teaching and nurturing the minds of children ages 18 months to 5 years. The greatest joy as a teacher is to see the growth of each child at the end of the year and the smile that spreads across their face when they are able to accomplish a task that they previously were unable to do. I grew up knowing I wanted to work with children and for the past twenty seven years, I have been able to do so. At this point in my life, I look back and wonder if I made the right choice, due to the fact that I am working, but unable to provide for myself. It’s a daily and weekly task for me to try and figure out how I am going to pay my rent, car payments, insurance, utilities, food and then that student loan. At the present time, I work full time at Mount Olive and then part time elsewhere. This is the general schedule for some of my colleagues at the present time. For the past ten to eleven years, we have not been able to have an increase in pay due to the lack of funding. Friends have asked why do you stay there and the response comes in sharing about the free hugs, kisses, and smiles I get through the day, and threats from parents about leaving. Even on my worst day I am reminded by a child how important my job is. As child care providers, we work with our hearts and then have to go home to worry about how we are going to survive. As we stand together today as early childhood educators, we are pleading with every one of you on the committee to listen to each story and then think about what would happen if there were no quality child care centers for parents to leave their precious gems while they go out to make a living. Parents share with me about how glad they are to be able to leave their children with us and not worry about them while they are at work. Working in the field as long as I have been, I have had the privilege of seeing many of my students grow and become parents themselves and we have a few of our former students who are now teachers at our center.

A few years ago, there was a push for early childhood teachers to have a BA but with that there has been no increase. So I went back to school, but while going through my courses reality hit: what I am going to do with this degree in ECE since there was no money there? So like many of my peers, I changed my major. So with that change Charts-a-Course no longer paid for my classes, so now I have a loan to deal with. I truly believe that early childhood teachers should be paid the same salary as any public school teacher; we have educated ourselves so we can educate the future leaders and citizens of this country. Teachers are not the only ones struggling, but also our parents. Daily conversations with them tell a whole deal about them, many leave one job to head to another. So what happens to the children? They leave one care giver to go to another until mom or dad picks up. The Care4Kids subsidy helps many of our parents who qualify pay for child care, which can take a good chunk of their paychecks, depending on the age of the child. Many share their appreciation for being able to get the help which benefits them, but most importantly their child. As I was writing down my testimony, I was overwhelmed and emotional.
just thinking about how difficult life has gotten even with two jobs. A few years ago, I would have never dreamed that this would be my life at this age. I urge each one of you to pass the following bills presented here today to help present and future child care workers in this state and across the country.