

Testimony of Barbara Distinti for HB 5221
Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK-CT)
Before Education Committee
March 6, 2020

Senator McCrory, Senator Bethel, Representative Sanchez, Representative McCarty and distinguished members of the Education Committee,

I appear today on behalf of Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK-CT), a statewide organization of parents, providers, attorneys and advocates who work tirelessly on behalf of students with disabilities. This Committee has been open to meeting with us and considering our views. For that, we are extremely thankful. Providing special education to Connecticut's most vulnerable students needs to be one of the State's most important priorities. Our investment in these children is designed to enable them to become useful effective participants in our society and to provide them with the skills and knowledge they will need to work and live in our communities

Our legislative agenda for the short 2020 session is as follows:

1. When children make the transition from Birth to Three to special education, current written policy precludes the Early Childhood professionals who provide services for those children from communicating recommendations to the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) that must design an Individual Education Program for that child. This means the only members of the PPT who have significant knowledge of the child's needs and progress are prevented from sharing their expertise with the team. We'd like to change that and allow Birth to Three providers to communicate their recommendations to the Planning and Placement Team and have the same protection against retaliation as was provided to school staff in P.A. 19-184.
2. Currently, many school districts significantly restrict or prohibit parents from providing important information to their children's PPT by preventing or inappropriately limiting

evaluators retained by parents from observing the child at school and observing proposed programs for the child. This both restricts the information to be used by the Team, and prevents the parents from fully participating in the process. We seek to pass legislation paralleling the Massachusetts observation law.

3. We strongly endorse legislation to make the Connecticut Technical High School System more receptive to students with special needs. Many students with disabilities thrive on hands-on problem solving, mechanical and technical work and Connecticut needs the skills of these individuals.

4. Connecticut General Statutes 10-15c currently prohibits discrimination in education, but disability is not listed as a protected class. We would like disability included as a protected class in this legislation.

5. Last session, the Legislature passed a bill to lower the age for the beginning of transition services to students diagnosed with autism to 14. We would like to lower the age for the beginning of transition services for all students with IEPs, not just for the subset who have ASD diagnoses.

We appreciate this opportunity to testify.