



The Commission on
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

CWCSEO

Connecticut General Assembly

**Testimony of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity
Presented to the Education Committee
March 6, 2020**

***S.B. No. 314 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM.**

***H.B. No. 5220 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM TO PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN AN EVEN START PROGRAM OR ENROLLED IN CERTAIN SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS.**

***H.B. No. 5222 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES.**

***H.B. No. 5213 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A PILOT PROGRAM FOR AN EARLY CHILDHOOD BUSINESS INCUBATOR MODEL.**

***H.B. No. 5380 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LITERACY.**

***S.B. No. 312 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL COUNSELORS.**

Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, Ranking and other distinguished members of the Education Committee; my name is Steven Hernández, Executive Director of the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity ("The Commission"). I'm joined by Kali Rohrbaugh, a LEE Public Policy Fellow at the Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

The Commission wishes to submit testimony in support of the following bills:

1. S.B. No. 314 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM.

The Commission supports S.B. No. 314, which would include Native American studies in the social studies curriculum for public schools. To support all residents of our state, and to ensure that everyone knows our shared history, we must teach students about the history of our country, a history that is synonymous with that of the Native Americans who live here.

Cultural competence in education is having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and families. Culturally competent pedagogy is one that ensures that all histories are being taught and provides an environment of respect and reciprocity of ideas. There is a wealth of history, heritage, and culture to be learned and appreciated about Connecticut's first peoples. By ensuring that Native American studies are taught in schools, we guarantee that the full history of Connecticut is being taught, rather than just the history of the dominant culture.

We know that most students across the United States don't get comprehensive, thoughtful, or even accurate education in Native American history and culture. A 2015 study by researchers at Pennsylvania State University found that 87% of content taught about Native Americans included only pre-1900 context and that 27 states did not name an individual Native American in their history standards. The authors of this research pointed out that when we look at the picture painted by their findings, it's "easy to argue that the narrative of U.S. history is painfully one-sided in its telling of the American narrative, especially concerning Indigenous Peoples' experiences."

As a Commission, we see cultural competence in our schools as a moral and ethical responsibility. We know that student outcomes can be improved by incorporating racial and ethnic minority contributions in the curriculum. The impact of having educators who can challenge and motivate diverse student populations can dramatically improve both our education system and our student's outcomes. For that reason, we support S.B. No. 314.

2. H.B. No. 5220 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM TO PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN AN EVEN START PROGRAM OR ENROLLED IN CERTAIN SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

The Commission supports H.B. No. 5220, which would expand eligibility in the Care4Kids program to parents who are participating in a local Even Start program or enrolled in certain secondary education programs. As it stands, the criteria to enroll in Care4Kids childcare subsidy program is far more restrictive than in 48 other states, where parents can use the childcare subsidy program while they are in school or a job training program. Although the rules vary from state to state, Connecticut is one of just two states that don't allow this.

Higher education can be a pathway for a more stable life, financially and otherwise. Many people can't go to college because they can't afford it or won't burden their families with the debt and the time away. Research shows that workers with higher education earn significantly more over their lifetimes, and college has often been dubbed "the key to the middle class." The median percentage earning of a person with an Associate's degree, above that of a high school graduate is 45%.¹

Moreover, and with regards to the programs this bill would expand eligibility for, Connecticut faces both a teacher and a nursing shortage. As Connecticut rapidly ages, our workforce grows smaller. For nurses, they are also facing the issue that with an aging population comes a larger number of people who require higher levels of care. At many of our community colleges with nursing programs, a large part of the student body is made up of "non-traditional" students, meaning that they are often balancing parenting, work, and school. Students with this level of responsibility suffer from lower graduation rates. For teachers, and particularly for our lowest-paid teachers (those who work in early education), the shortage was so acute last year that our legislature pushed back the deadline for Bachelor's Degrees for all early educators in the state-subsidized program. Enabling these students by providing them with better access to necessary childcare.

H.B. No. 5220 would be beneficial to Connecticut's economy, as well—with a more skilled workforce comes higher levels of pay and thus higher levels of reinvestment into their communities. Further, with our work with the 2Gen Initiative, the Commission knows

¹ <https://www.thirdway.org/report/the-state-of-american-higher-education-outcomes-in-2019>

how vital it is to build full family capacity and well-being. For these reasons, we support H.B. No. 5220.

3. H.B. No. 5222 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES.

The Commission supports H.B. No. 5222, which would expand eligibility in the Care4Kids program to include homeless families. If enacted, this legislation will allow families who are staying in shelters to become fully eligible for Care4Kids while seeking/searching for employment for up to twelve weeks. Through our work with the 2Gen initiative, which builds family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and adults in their lives together, we know how important it is for some families to receive this crucial support for a safe, healthy, and successful life.

Young children experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk developmentally and educationally, and quality childcare and early education programs help to mitigate the long-term effects of extreme poverty. Research has shown that support for homeless families for children can reduce foster care placements, as well as school moves and other hardships. For homeless children, access to school is complicated by high mobility as well as the lack of school supplies and clothes, funds for transportation and mandatory records to enter into a new school.² Further, African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics/Latinxs are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness.³

For children of all ages who are experiencing homelessness, participation in Care4Kids and other similar programs create the much-needed stability that is often missing in their lives. For some parents, access to safe, stable, and affordable health care is necessary for them to enter and remain in the workforce. By investing in a multigenerational approach to early care and learning, by providing children with safe care and parents with adequate time for work and family care necessities, we are working to ensure that all families and family members have the supports they need to lead successful lives.

4. H.B. No. 5213 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A PILOT PROGRAM FOR AN EARLY CHILDHOOD BUSINESS INCUBATOR MODEL.

The Commission supports H.B. No. 5213, which would establish a pilot program that authorizes the Commissioner of Early Childhood to issue a license to a person or group of persons to operate a family child care home in a space that is not a private home and that has been provided by an association, organization, corporation, institution, or agency. We support this bill in an effort to solve the shortage of childcare for infants and toddlers.

To provide childcare that is linguistically and culturally appropriate and suited to the parent's needs, including providing nontraditional hours, we need to offer supports that break down the barriers new entrepreneurs may face when establishing their businesses.

² https://www.childrensdefense.org/policy/resources/soac-2020-housing/?gclid=CjwKCAiA44LzBRB-EiwA-jJipKm8Z8MhnS3LRN72MsV83CtAX0WSg5WiyEYeHpdFsLOz98z6yxQX-BoCYC4QAvD_BwE

³ <https://endhomelessness.org/demographic-data-project-race/>

Childcare entrepreneurs may face barriers such as lack of business skills and rental rules that do not allow home-based businesses. Family care childcare providers serve nearly two thousand children daily in Greater Hartford alone, despite the fact that many lack critical resources. This innovative legislation would allow these childcare providers a supportive place to launch their business and learn the skills essential for sustaining it.

Moreover, with the shortage of childcare providers, many parents struggle to find great childcare. The shortage impacts a parent's ability to return to the workplace, particularly for women. The difficulty of finding space and support for family childcare providers only exacerbates the issue. Eliminating some of the barriers and allowing for easier access to create a family childcare business is useful for both parents and entrepreneurs alike. We approve H.B. No. 5213 for these reasons.

5. H.B. No. 5380 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LITERACY.

The Commission supports H.B. No. 5380, which would expand the intensive reading instruction program to include grades four and five, and to establish the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success within the Department of Education.

Connecticut has one of the largest reading achievement gaps in the country. This persistent and insidious reading achievement gap affects thousands of children across Connecticut, and disproportionately impacts children from poverty and children from underrepresented groups. The long-term effects of the reading achievement gap are significant and substantial – with compounding negative impacts not only on academic achievement, but also on important social and economic outcomes as well.

Fortunately, CT has made important investments in supporting reading success for all students through CT's K-3 Literacy Initiative (CK3LI) and other efforts. CK3LI has provided research-based teacher and principal training in reading instruction, developed family engagement modules in literacy, and implemented a comprehension K-3 reading model with the goal of ensuring reading success for all students. CK3LI has supported 76 schools from 17 districts and has resulted in measurable and meaningful improvements in student reading outcomes in high priority school districts in Connecticut. The Act Concerning School Literacy will sustain and extend the reach and effectiveness of these efforts to narrow the reading achievement gap in Connecticut.

The Commission particularly want to express our support of the establishment of the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success. We believe the Center will provide important ongoing support to the SDE in ensuring that reading efforts reflect current scientific knowledge about reading instruction and will build state-wide coaching and training capacity for assisting schools and districts implement the intensive reading support program outlined in the Act.

6. S.B. No. 312 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL COUNSELORS.

The Commission supports S.B. No. 312, which would include a requirement in the guidelines for a comprehensive school counseling program that school counselors spend at least eighty percent of their work time during regular school hours providing school counseling services directly to individuals or groups of students. The Commission supports this bill as members of the Social Emotional Learning and School Climate Collaborative and

as proponents of all students receiving crucial Social and Emotional Learning and mental health supports.

As parents, teachers, state leaders, and many others have seen, our youth are struggling. In 2017-2018, a nationwide study showed that suicidal thinking, severe depression, and rates of self-injury among U.S. college students had more than doubled over the past decade. According to the National Institutes of Health, nearly 1 in 3 of all adolescents ages 13 to 18 will experience an anxiety disorder. Between 2007 and 2012, anxiety disorders between children and teens went up by 20%. For many students, school counselors are crucial resources for their time in school. When counselors are pulled into duties, such as testing coordination, they're pulled away from providing the direct services that students need. Particularly, with the already too high ratio of students to counselors (in 2015, Connecticut's average ratio of students to counselors was 466:1)⁴ it's imperative that counselors have every possible moment available to spend with students. Research shows that a comprehensive school counseling program has a positive impact on student outcomes, including improved attendance, including improved attendance, reduced discipline, improved grades, increased SAT scores, increased graduation rates, increased college-going and persistence rates. Our students deserve that, and counselors should have all of the time necessary to provide their students with the services they need.

⁴ <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/ratioreport.pdf>