



The Connection

Thank you for granting me opportunity to speak today in support of the HB 5222 ACT to expand eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program for families experiencing homelessness.

My name is Elizabeth LaRegina and I am a Vocational Specialist for the *Supportive Housing for Families Program* at The Connection Inc.

Supportive Housing for Families is a child welfare program that provides intensive case management, vocational supports and temporary housing subsidies to families who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, when housing is the barrier to family reunification or preservation.

As a Vocational Specialist, it is my role to assist families with finding and sustaining long-term employment that will help them gain self-sufficiency. Since starting in November 2017, I have had the privilege of working with over 75 families in the New Haven, Bridgeport, Middletown and New London areas. The families I partner with come from diverse backgrounds and have varying strengths, abilities, beliefs and goals. But one commonality they have is their need for safe and reliable childcare. As it stands today, parents experiencing homelessness are not eligible for Care 4 Kids *until* they have gained employment. However, my last 3 years at The Connection has taught me that it is nearly impossible to secure employment without establishing childcare first. Asking moms and dads, who are struggling with homelessness, to go out and find a job, without a safe place to send their children, is making an already stressful situation more paralyzing.

Parents are forced to decide between leaving their child in a potentially harmful situation, or not having enough money to meet their child's basic needs. No parent should be put in this predicament.



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Additionally, many parents get caught in the endless cycle of securing a job, applying for Care 4 Kids, losing the job they secured due to lack of childcare, and then, consequently, no longer qualify for Care 4 Kids. Thus, the current situation generates frustration, hopelessness and a greater utilization of public shelter systems. Limited access to childcare prevents parents from professional opportunities and financial stability. Limited access to childcare strips children of regular play, cognitive stimulation and positive peer development. Limited access to childcare prevents families from breaking the cycles of generational poverty. Care 4 Kids is an amazing non-profit organization whose work is undervalued. They already help so many families in Connecticut, but the expansion of eligibility requirements would grant them the ability to greater serve families, who are already battling some of life's most significant challenges, with the childcare support they need to seek employment and create a better life for themselves and their children.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elizabeth LaRegina