



ALL OUR KIN INC

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**Testimony Submitted by Christie Balka in Favor of HB 5121  
"An Act Concerning Protections for Certain Group Child Care and Family Child Care Homes"  
LCO #848**

**Connecticut General Assembly-Housing Committee  
February 18, 2020**

Good afternoon Representative McGee, Senator Anwar, Representative Rochelle, Senator McCrory, and members of the Housing Committee. My name is Christie Balka and I am the Policy Director for All Our Kin. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

All Our Kin is a nonprofit organization that trains and supports 40% of Connecticut's family child care providers, giving them the tools and resources to provide high-quality early care and education and run sustainable child care businesses. These child care providers transform opportunities for thousands of Connecticut's youngest children and their families. Connecticut faces an acute child care shortage, including a gap of 51,000 spaces for infants and toddlers. Protecting and increasing access to family and group child care is a key strategy to increase the state's supply of licensed, high-quality child care. HB 5121, "An Act Concerning Protection for Certain Group Child Care and Family Child Care Homes" proposes to expand access to licensed, high-quality care, making it a win for children, parents, child care providers and Connecticut's economy. I urge you to support HB 5121.

Research shows that 85% of brain development occurs during a child's first three years of life. High-quality early care and education during this critical period lays the foundation for children's success and wellbeing later in life. The quality of care is fundamental: developmentally appropriate care provided by trained professionals in a safe, healthy environment settings improves children's cognitive, physical, and social-emotional skills. Licensed child care is the first step on the path to quality.

The Need for Licensed Child Care in Connecticut

A 2018 report found that 44% of Connecticut's population lives in a "child care desert," defined as a census tract with "little or no access to quality child care."<sup>1</sup> The child care shortage is particularly acute in rural and suburban communities and for our youngest children. Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood (OEC) estimates that we are short 51,000 licensed child care spaces for infants and toddlers. The OEC has identified closing this gap as a critical priority for the wellbeing of the state's children, families and its economy. Protecting family and group child care is a key strategy to increase Connecticut's supply of licensed child care, especially for infants and toddlers and families in rural and suburban communities.

## Family and Group Child Care

In Connecticut, licensed family child care is defined as the supervision of a group of no more than six full-time children (including the child care provider's own children who are not in school full-time) that takes place in the caregiver's home. Licensed group child care offers similar services, but allows seven to twelve full-time children to be cared for in the caregiver's home with additional staff present. Like child care centers, licensed family and group child care homes meet state-mandated adult-child ratios and minimum indoor and outdoor space requirements. They must show that facilities and equipment are in good condition, follow specific personal care routines, meet staff training requirements and other rules to protect children's health and safety.

Family and group child care provide significant benefits for:

- **Children:** Our youngest children receive safe, loving, nurturing care in licensed child care settings that meet state health and safety standards. This care facilitates children's healthy growth and development, laying the foundation for success in school, in the workforce, and in life.
- **Working Parents:** Connecticut's families, especially those who face the greatest barriers to accessing care, find affordable licensed care that meets their needs, allowing them to go to work knowing that their children are safe, loved, and learning. A study conducted by the University of Connecticut's Center for Economic Analysis found that every family child care provider licensed with the support of All Our Kin allowed 4-5 parents to enter the workforce.
- **Entrepreneurs:** Home-based providers operate small child care businesses, providing for their own families, increasing their earnings, paying down debt, often moving to a larger home and supporting the broader economy.
- **Employers:** When making decisions about where to locate, employers look for a stable workforce. In the short-term, home-based child care enables parents to participate in the workforce without the frequent absenteeism that results from informal child care. In the long-term, quality home-based care equips the next generation of employees with the soft skills that employers are seeking, including punctuality, follow-up, cooperation and conflict resolution.
- **The Economy:** A University of Connecticut study found that for every \$1 invested in licensing family child care providers, \$15-\$20 was returned to the regional economy. Between 2006 and 2009, family child care providers licensed through All Our Kin created about \$18.4 million in additional tax revenue and generated \$15.2 million in macroeconomic benefits to the New Haven region alone.

Family and group child care are particularly important for families that face the greatest barriers to accessing care, including families with infants and toddlers, families that work extended hours, families of children with special needs and families without access to reliable transportation. In addition, family and group child care are an important source of care in rural and suburban communities that lack the population density to support child care centers within reasonable driving distance.

The benefits of family and group child care include:

- Intimate, family-like settings, often preferred for infants and toddlers

- Flexible operating hours, to match parents' work schedules
- Mixed-aged groups, so siblings can be cared for in the same setting
- Often more affordable than center-based care
- Language, culture, and values that reflect the communities served

### About All Our Kin

For the past two decades All Our Kin has worked to ensure that Connecticut's children and families have the foundation they need to succeed. We have a homegrown, nationally-recognized model proven to increase the supply, quality, and sustainability of family child care. We support providers at every stage of professional development, working with them to become licensed, operate successful businesses and provide high-quality care to children.

Family child care providers participate in All Our Kin's structured training program and receive coaching to support them in obtaining their state child care licenses. This is a rigorous process to ensure that facilities are safe for children and educators are knowledgeable about current health and safety practices. Licensed family child care providers may participate in our business training to ensure they succeed as business owners, and they receive educational coaching to improve the quality of their programs. Finally, All Our Kin supports family child care providers to meet national accreditation standards, which reflect the highest level of quality in family child care. With a presence in New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford, Norwalk, Danbury, Hartford and the surrounding communities, All Our Kin works with 40% of Connecticut's family child care providers.

### Barriers to Family and Group Child Care Licensing in Connecticut

In our work with family child care providers, All Our Kin has seen the imposition of housing and zoning practices that create significant barriers to licensing, maintaining and expanding high-quality, home-based child care. They barriers include, but are not limited to:

- Zoning ordinances that require group child care providers to apply to local authorities for special permits or special exceptions, which are often denied.
- Special permit applications that force providers to pay fees, appear at hearings and often hire a lawyer at considerable expense.
- Many towns impose excessive parking requirements and other restrictions on home-based child care programs.
- Some landlords and public housing authorities insist on leases that restrict child care businesses, or initially agree to allow the operation of a child care business and then change their mind (sometimes after a lease is signed, and even after the program has started operating).

Providers often invest significant time and money before learning—despite meeting state licensing requirements—that they cannot operate a family or group child care business in their residence. Here are some of their stories:

### **LaQuavia Quicksey, New Haven**

LaQuavia Quicksey is the owner of Tiny Blessings Daycare LLC in New Haven. She has been a licensed family child care provider for seven years. LaQuavia operated her family child care business in one home for several years before the property was sold, resulting in a different homeowner/landlord. LaQuavia was upfront about her child care business with the new owners, as she had been with the previous owner. A month after the new owners bought the property, they gave her three months notice to move. Later, she learned that it was because she operated a family child care program, although they had never talked to her about this directly.

LaQuavia found a new residence and was told that she could operate her business there. A year and a half later, the residential association notified her that they had made a mistake—that she was never supposed to have been granted permission to operate her family child care program there. From that point on, she was harassed by other residents in the complex; at one point, someone jumped in front of the car of a parent picking up their child from LaQuavia's program, and started asking questions about LaQuavia's business. Despite the fact that she was licensed by the state and had received permission to operate her business when she moved in, LaQuavia was forced to move again—coming close to homelessness in the process. Both incidents caused disruption not only for LaQuavia and her business, but for the children and families who relied on her child care program. "I was harassed and I suffered mental and emotional abuse. I will never live in a condo or an apartment again, because they have too much control over your life."

### **Suzette McKenzie, Bridgeport**

Suzette McKenzie was the owner of Mom Plus Two Child Care in Bridgeport and a licensed family child care provider for 18 years. Building on the success of her family child care program, Suzette wanted to expand her business, converting it to a group child care so that she would be able to support more children and families. She was notified by the City of Bridgeport that in order to modify her property to receive approval for a group child care business, she would need to hire an architect and a lawyer. She expressed that hiring both an architect and a lawyer was too much of a financial burden, and was told that she would need a lawyer to navigate the City laws, even though she was confident that she could advocate for herself. Suzette decided to create her own business plan and submit it to Bridgeport's Office of Planning and Economic Development. She never received a response, and eventually she stopped pursuing group child care. "I felt like I was putting in too much effort without getting anywhere. In my neighborhood, sometimes it seems like it's easier for someone to turn a property into a liquor store than a daycare." A year after telling us this story, Suzette closed her family child care business.

### **Josefina Santa Cruz, Stamford**

Josefina Santa Cruz is the owner of Kinder Crayons child care in Stamford. Last year, she was looking for a new house to move into, but struggled to find something affordable. Finally, she found three affordable options, but all of the landlords denied to rent to her on the basis of her family child care business. She showed them her state license, proof of insurance, and ability to pay; she also explained to them that as a licensed child care provider, she would take extra special care of the property, to ensure that it continued to meet state health and safety requirements and that it was an attractive place for families. All of this was to no avail. Finally, Josefina was able to find an apartment and has been operating her business, but she does not feel secure in her housing situation. She is worried that the landlord will change their mind and ask her to move at any moment because of her family child care business. "I am a resident of Stamford, Connecticut and I vote. I want to ask legislators to please support HB No. 5121."

### **Maria Carrillo, New Haven**

Maria Carrillo is the owner of Pili 's Daycare in New Haven. Her child care program is accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care, demonstrating that it meets nationally-recognized standards of quality. As a result of the nurturing, high-quality care that Maria provides her child care program is always full, and there is often a waitlist. But, it was not always easy for her to operate her program.

Seven years ago when Maria was looking to rent a house and start her family child care program, no one wanted to rent to her. She worked with two realtors over ten months, often visiting 2-3 houses each weekend. Despite the fact that she could afford a nice property and had proof of insurance for her child care program, landlords repeatedly turned her down. She began to lose hope that she would ever be able to operate her program. Eventually, she found a house where she has been operating a family child care program for seven years. However, she is always afraid that the owner might sell the property, and she will need to begin her search all over again. "Please do not close the doors to us because we are family child care providers—we are licensed by the state, we are educated and have insurance. We provide a safe, loving space for young kids."

### **Evelyn Maiano Montiel, Bridgeport**

Evelyn Majano Montiel is the owner of The Angels Daycare in Bridgeport. Recently, she became the first Latina family child care provider in Fairfield County to achieve national accreditation from the National Association for Family Child Care, and she is very proud of this accomplishment. Evelyn goes the extra distance to provide exceptional care for the children and families in her community. She offers two shifts: daytime care and evening care. Her program is always full, and she often has a waitlist.

When Evelyn first began looking for a property to operate her family child care program, she struggled to find a landlord who would rent to her. Now that her program is so successful, she is looking to rent a new house that will better allow her and the two child care assistants she employs, to support the children in her care. She has been looking for six months, with no luck— landlords continually turn her down when they learn about her child care program. Evelyn feels stuck, knowing she is capable of doing more for the children and families she serves if she had a space better suited to her program. "I am glad that HB 5121 is being considered. So many family child care providers struggle to find a housing situation that supports their business."

### Connecticut Should Enact HB 5121 to Strengthen Protection for Family and Group Child Care Homes

Restrictions imposed by zoning and landlords force child care providers to operate unregulated child care businesses or to close. Connecticut has a clear interest in eliminating unregulated child care: 1) the state cannot evaluate the safety of unregulated child care businesses and 2) licensed child care providers comply with baseline health and safety standards, receive oversight from the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, and contribute tax revenue. Most importantly, family and group child care homes increase the availability of safe, nurturing, licensed child care options for children and families.

Connecticut can and should do more to encourage and protect licensed family and group child care. States including New York and California have adopted strong protections against zoning restrictions and restrictive leases for home-based child care.

HB 5121 is an important step toward protecting and expanding access to family and group child care in Connecticut. The bill would benefit the child care providers whose stories are included above, and the

many others who face challenges to starting, maintaining, or expanding their licensed child care businesses, in the following ways:

- HB 5121 would amend section 8-3j of the general statutes to include licensed group child care homes and require municipalities to certify compliance.
- Section 8-3j of the general statutes states: "Regulation of family child care homes. No zoning regulation shall treat any family child care home registered pursuant to section 17b-733 in a manner different from single or multifamily dwellings." By including group child care homes in section 8-3j, Connecticut would ensure that these larger home-based child care programs, which have the ability to serve more children and families, are afforded the same protections against restrictive zoning requirements as family child care homes.
- In addition, by asking municipalities to certify compliance, Connecticut can end the restrictive zoning regulations that still exist in some municipalities related to family child care—in violation of current state statute.
- HB 5121 would amend the general statutes to prohibit landlords from limiting or banning the operation of licensed group child care and licensed family child care. The Bill includes measures to protect landlords as well, with the goal of helping landlords feel more comfortable renting to a licensed child care provider. These protections include the following:
  - HB 5121 would amend chapter 700 of the general statutes to permit owners of licensed group child care homes and licensed family child care homes to name such owners' landlords, homeowner associations and condominium associations as additional insureds on such providers' homeowners insurance policies.
  - HB 5121 would amend title 47a of the general statutes to permit a landlord to request an additional security deposit from a tenant who operates a licensed group child care home or licensed family child care home at a property leased from such landlord.

All Our Kin urges you to support HB 5121 to reduce barriers to child care in Connecticut. Protecting and expanding access to family and group child care is a win for many groups: more children will receive individualized care in a safe, home-based environment; parents will be able to access affordable child care that allows them to participate in the workforce; employers will appreciate a stable workforce; and home-based entrepreneurs will be able to operate much-needed licensed child care businesses. Thank you for considering this important step towards ensuring that high-quality, affordable child care is accessible to all children and families who need it.

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<sup>i</sup> Malik, Rasheed et al., "America's Child Care Deserts in 2018," Center for American Progress, Dec. 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/12/06/461643/americas-child-care-deserts2018/>.