

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5220

AN ACT EXPANDING ELIGIBILITY IN THE CARE4KIDS PROGRAM TO PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN AN EVEN START PROGRAM OR ENROLLED

Title: IN CERTAIN SECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

Vote Date: 3/9/2020

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/6/2020

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation will expand eligibility in the care for kids program to parents who are participating in a local Even Start program or enrolled in certain secondary educational programs.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Beth Bye, Commissioner, State Office of Early Childhood

The Commissioner supports the intent of the legislation; however, the estimated cost prevents the implementation based on the state's budget allowance.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Loring Barber, Director of Hiring and Recruiting, Educational Playcare

Loring writes in support of HB 5220 as a recruiter for a child care organization. The state currently faces a lack of qualified early childhood educators and many child care centers are feeling the repercussions. The specific organization that Loring recruits for is accredited and because of that they are required to have at least one teacher that holds a degree in the field in each classroom. The degrees that they accept can range from an Associate's in Early Childhood to a Master's in Early Childhood. Since June 2019, they have interviewed 1,576 candidates and only 103 held a degree in the field. Expanding the access to child care for those seeking higher education would improve their lives and futures in the workforce.

Mary Cecchinato, Executive Director, Torrington Child Care Center Inc.

Mary writes in support of HB 5220 and notes its importance in helping low income families. Currently, low income families remain impoverished because they do not have access to quality child care and it keeps them from bettering themselves by obtaining degrees and securing better paying employment opportunities. She remarks that the state needs highly skilled workers and workers need quality child care.

Claudia Choc and Juana Chomo, Even Start Parents

Claudia and Juana write in support of HB 5220 and the opportunity it has provided them to learn English to better their chances of employment in the state while also ensuring their children's wellbeing as they do so.

Steven Hernández, Executive Director, Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity

Steven writes in support of HB 5220. He notes that Connecticut is one of only two states that does not allow for parents enrolled in either an Even Start program or certain secondary education programs to use child care subsidy programs while they attend. Steven addresses how education in many cases leads to higher paying jobs and more stability but without quality child care it is difficult for those seeking a degree to even apply in the fear that they will not be able to balance all these factors.

Jamie Fournier

Jamie writes in support of HB 5220 as a parent and student currently affected by the battle between education and child care. Jamie will soon become ineligible for Care4Kids since she left her job in order to complete her degree and is now not covered under the requirement that she is not working. She believed that she was covered under the provision that she was pursuing "education," as is specified on the C4K application but was later informed that education did not include college unless it is a JFES program. Now, Jamie faces an increase in child care costs from \$139.65/month to \$85.50/week. She also fears that her child's father may absolve his financial responsibility to pay for child care as it no longer is considered a work-related expense. The passage of HB 5220 would mitigate these concerns.

Elizabeth Fraser, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services

Elizabeth writes in support of HB 5220. 30% of births in Connecticut are to mothers who have either a high school level education or less, and being able to obtain well-paying, long term employment is difficult. Education has been directly correlated to income level and parents earning low incomes have a harder time being able to provide for themselves and their children. These hardships also disproportionately affect families of color and perpetuate a cycle of poverty for low income families. This legislation provides a pathway for parents to better themselves and keep the workforce in the state educated and available.

Merrill Gay, Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance

Merrill writes in support of HB 5220. He first notes that HB 5220 is similar to SB 934, a bill passed in the 2019 legislative session, with a more focused objective. The bill is specific to addressing the workforce shortages in: Advanced Manufacturing, Nursing and Teaching (including Early Childhood Education), and Even Start programs. Many of these fields have jobs all over the state that are looking for fulfillment, but they require some level of formal education or job training. Providing parents seeking to advance in these career fields with access to the C4K program would help the families and the state advance.

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

The foundation writes in support of HB 5220 and emphasizes the importance of quality child care for working families that want to obtain long term employment and promote learning and development to their children. This legislation would help increase family earning potential and reduce the amount of families in poverty. The foundation would encourage the bill to expand eligibility to families that seek education or job training in all fields of study.

Lina Kronenberger, Donna Labbe, Laiza Meléndez, Directors, CT Even Start

Lina, Donna, and Laiza write in support of HB 5220 and attest to the success of the programs and their impact on economic development. The Even Start program encompasses three main components: Adult Education/Workforce Development, Early Childhood Education, and Family Engagement. Families that have gone through the program can attest to the success of the program and expanding eligibility would not only help the individual but also the state by increasing higher paid workers and subsequently the tax they pay.

Shannon Marimón, Executive Director, ReadyCT

Shannon writes in support of HB 5220. Accessing affordable child care is cited as one of the main reasons that adults do not complete their higher education. CT United Way reported in 2018 that child care cost on average \$1,700/month for an infant and preschool aged child in a registered program. If Connecticut has statutory goal of creating a workforce comprised of 70% higher education degree holders, the passage of HB 5220 would support that. Finally, she notes that Connecticut is one of only two states that does not provide a child care subsidy for parents pursuing higher education or job training.

Dr. Kate Parr, Research Professor, UCONN School of Social Work

Dr. Parr writes in support of HB 5220 and as an evaluator of the Even Start Program in Connecticut, can attest to its importance. The program in Connecticut is unique in comparison to nationwide programs because it focuses on both parental and child education. While parents attend courses towards a diploma or their English literacy, children receive quality child care focused on social-emotional learning and enrichment programs. They also provide collaborative programs between parents and children that promote healthy home habits and connections. However, the program faces funding issues and that is why collaborating with the C4K program would help to maintain funds and continue serving the families that need it most.

Many also expressed the difficulty in finding child care options while pursuing their education. Parents feel as though they are forced to choose between child care and their potential future economic success. Allowing for C4K eligibility to extend to parents going through education or work training to access quality child care would greatly reduce their stress in their finances, ability to continue coursework, and create peace of mind for their child's well-being.

- Dr. Susan Radway, Riverfront Children's Center
- Mary Gregg
- Maeghan Perdue
- Chenae Russell

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: Lauren Riley,
Asst. Comm Clerk

Date: March 17, 2020