My name is Mary Cecchinato and I am the Executive Director of Torrington Child Care Center, Inc. and we serve 43 preschool children and I am the co-chair of the State Funded Child Development Center’s Director Forum. State Funded Centers established over 50 years ago provide high quality, affordable early care and education to over 4,000 children ages birth to school age throughout Connecticut. We appreciate the investments the Legislature has made over the years to ensure low and moderate working families can work and know their children are in a safe, healthy, enriching environment.

The Forum supports most of the new provisions in HB 6558, “An Act Concerning Issues Relating to the Provision of Early Childhood Education and Services in Connecticut”. The bill recognizes that the childcare industry historically is underfunded and struggles to provide adequate salaries for teachers in the early childhood education field. Specifically, we support establishing additional income tax credits and also instituting an education loan forgiveness program. These are smart policies and will help alleviate financial burdens on teachers.

The bill also expands the definition of family childcare to allow organizations to host family childcare programs in their facilities. For example, people attending a job training or educational program could have better access to childcare if that institution housed a family childcare program. Another example is utilizing space in housing authority buildings affording an employment opportunity for residents. As a pilot in a limited number of communities, it has no funding attached to it.

The pandemic has dramatically demonstrated that childcare is the lynch pin in Connecticut’s economy- without childcare families just can’t go to work! The pandemic disproportionately impacts lower income families and people of color working in retail, restaurants, and in service and entertainment industries. On top of job loss, families had to deal with school closings and children at home learning remotely. Lack of affordable childcare became a critical issue. Many parents were forced to leave their jobs to stay home with their children for lack of affordable childcare. There is clearly a need to expand eligibility for Care4Kids to include people in job training and education programs to close the gap in access and opportunity for all Connecticut residents. Now is the time to invest in expansion of Care4Kids!

I am very concerned about the Task Force that is being developed in Section 7 line 291 of this bill. The task force does not have enough representation of people working in Early Childhood programs that can give information into what is truly needed. The charge that the Task Force is asked to do is create a new credential to replace the ECTC (Early Childhood Teacher’s
Credential) which will give early childhood teachers a pathway to the public school system. Historically we hire staff help them to get their Bachelor’s degree and a majority of them leave and get jobs in the public schools, due to the low wages we can offer. We already struggle to find qualified staff and if there is a credential that staff can take and get hired in the public school it will drastically reduce pool of candidates to hire.

The Task force that is need for Early Childhood business is to look at compensation so that we can offer competitive wages. This is how you can keep the Early Childhood Industry in Connecticut going.

Please consider a Task Force to focus on compensation for the dedicated early childhood professionals who continue to serve children and families daily.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

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