To Whom It May Concern:

I am an early childhood educator working at a small non-profit nursery school in New Haven that has 12 CT school readiness slots (part day and school day).
Our director is on the verge of retiring, having guided us strongly through the pandemic. The hiring committee has a few, but only a few, qualified candidates to interview. Who will lead us?
I am part of a 5 person teaching team with significant institutional longevity.. All of us are nearing 60. We are nearing retirement age (especially for a job that is physically demanding). Who will replace us when we retire?
We have our lowest enrollment in my 19 years at the school. Not low enough to close us, but low enough to make us more frugal than we already are about expenditures.
Our school readiness slots go fast. Our full fee slots are slow to fill. Families cannot afford our fees which are average for our location. We want to be affordable and we try hard to be affordable, but we are not affordable for too many families. Will we have enough students to survive?

We are not alone.
Connecticut's child care system is teetering on the brink of collapse. Parents pay too much. Educators make too little. Providers can't survive — and kids can't thrive. We must transform this broken system before it's too late. We need state dollars. We need federal dollars.

The proposal to expand subsidies to corporations which provide child care in Connecticut ignores the ongoing serious staff shortages. Where will employees for these new programs come from when existing programs cannot find staff and are closing classrooms? Will staff be pulled from existing programs, further weakening them?

I have only been able to work for less than $15.00 an hour for 19 years at the same school because I am married and my spouse makes approximately 7 times what I make. I have a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Harvard College and a master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Tufts University. I could have made different choices about my career path, but I love working with young children, my heart is in the classroom, and I take joy in my urban, diverse little program that allows me to make my corner of New Haven a better place for children and families.

I am technically an hourly worker, but I am also a teacher. Early childhood educators are never adequately compensated for all the extra time they spend on planning, set up, clean up, assessments, conferences, and all the other work that goes into providing a high quality early childhood program. They are not compensated for all of their personal money they spend on supplies and materials. My spouse jokes that sometimes it seems like I am paying to work where I do. That's not quite true.

Ironically, my personal financial losses do not make my program more affordable for my families. Here in Westville and across the state, families and educators are being crushed

beneath a crumbling system. When it fails, as it is likely to do without consistent help in both the short and long term for all stakeholders, how will parents go to work or go to school?

What could be done differently in this budget to adequately support early child education?

Fund Care4Kids to support providers and families.
The Governor's proposal to add $14.2 million and $53 million to the Care4Kids program is necessary, but in no way sufficient. The Governor's proposal will increase the value of Care4Kids certificates to keep up with the inflation in child care costs which is very important, but this budget assumes that 2,000 fewer children will receive the subsidy at a time when tens of thousands of families are struggling with the cost of child care. We need to do both. Raise the value of the Care4Kids certificates and serve more families.

Support fair wages for early childhood educators to stabilize their employment.
Early educators are some of the lowest paid workers in the economy. The average wage for a child care worker is $14.97, and for a preschool teacher it's $15.18. Self employed family child care providers typically work much longer hours and average less than $8.50 per hour.

Fund School Readiness fairly, including full-time, part-time, and school day slots.
The Governor's proposal to raise the School Readiness rates to $10,500 in FY25 falls far short of what is needed. The per child rates have been unchanged since 2015 when minimum wage was $9.15. By the start of FY24 the minimum wage will have gone up by 64%. Programs need a substantial raise now! To retain teachers and attract the new staff needed to reopen closed classrooms, wages must go up. OEC's Narrow Cost Analysis puts the cost of pre-k at $16,138. All families, receiving grants or not, should be given real choices about how many hours they want their child to be in school. High quality early childhood care and education should never mean one size fits all. School readiness funding should be sufficient to encourage programs to continue to participate, not to withdraw because the costs outweigh the benefits.

Sincerely,

Anne E. Olcott