

AN ACT ESTABLISHING EARLY START CT.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) As used in this section and
2 sections 2 to 10, inclusive, of this act:

3 (1) "Accredited" means accredited by the National Association for the
4 Education of Young Children, National Association for Family Child
5 Care, Early Head Start or Head Start federal approval, or other
6 nationally recognized accreditations or certifications as approved by the
7 commissioner;

8 (2) "Commissioner" means the Commissioner of Early Childhood;

9 (3) "Office" means the Office of Early Childhood; and

10 (4) "Early Start CT" means the state-funded early care and education
11 system administered by the office that coordinates and facilitates the
12 efficient delivery of early childhood care and education programs for
13 eligible children.

14 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) The Office of Early Childhood
15 shall operate and administer Early Start CT in order to:

16 (1) Provide open access for infants and toddlers and preschool-age
17 children to high-quality programs that promote the health and safety of
18 children and prepare them for school;

19 (2) Provide opportunities for parents to choose among affordable and

20 accredited and Head Start approved programs;

21 (3) Encourage coordination and cooperation among programs and
22 prevent the duplication of services;

23 (4) Recognize the specific service needs and unique resources
24 available to particular municipalities;

25 (5) Prevent or minimize the potential for developmental delay in
26 children prior to their reaching the age of five;

27 (6) Strengthen the family through: (A) Encouragement of family
28 engagement and partnership in a child's development and education,
29 and (B) enhancement of a family's capacity to meet the special needs of
30 the children, including children with disabilities;

31 (7) Reduce educational costs by decreasing the need for special
32 education services for school-age children;

33 (8) Assure that children with disabilities are integrated into programs
34 available to children who do not have disabilities;

35 (9) Improve the availability and quality of Early Start CT programs
36 and their coordination with the services of child care providers;

37 (10) Facilitate the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the
38 children, families and staff in Early Start CT programs; and

39 (11) Maximize local and federal early childhood education funding
40 to expand capacity and access.

41 Sec. 3. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) The Office of Early Childhood
42 shall establish a sliding fee scale for families participating in Early Start
43 CT. Such sliding scale shall be based on family income and align with
44 the sliding fee scale used in the child care subsidy program described in
45 section 17b-749 of the general statutes.

46 Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) The Commissioner of Early

47 Childhood shall implement policies and procedures necessary to (1)
48 administer the provisions of sections 1 to 3, inclusive, and 5 to 10,
49 inclusive, of this act, (2) implement infant and toddler and school-age
50 ratios and group size requirements, and (3) implement head teacher
51 staffing requirements for programs that serve only school-age children,
52 while in the process of adopting such policies and procedures in
53 regulation form. Any existing regulations relating to infant and toddler
54 and school-age ratios, group size requirements and head teacher
55 staffing requirements for programs that serve only school-age children
56 that are generally applicable to child care centers and group child care
57 homes shall continue to be applicable to such centers and homes that
58 serve infants and toddlers and school-age children until replaced by the
59 policies and procedures described in this section. The commissioner
60 shall post notice of the intent to adopt regulations on the department's
61 Internet web site and the eRegulations System not later than twenty
62 days after the date of implementation of such policies and procedures.
63 Such policies and procedures shall be valid until the time final
64 regulations are adopted.

65 Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As part of Early Start CT, the
66 state, acting by and in the discretion of the Commissioner of Early
67 Childhood, may enter into direct or third-party contracts to provide
68 financial assistance to municipalities, local and regional boards of
69 education, regional educational service centers, family resource centers,
70 Head Start programs, preschool programs, nonprofit organizations,
71 child care centers, group child care homes, family child care homes, as
72 such terms are described in section 19a-77 of the general statutes, and
73 any other programs that meet standards established by the
74 commissioner for the purpose of operating early childhood care and
75 education programs that focus on providing early childhood access
76 based on economic, social or environmental conditions, including in
77 regions with insufficient access to child care. At least sixty per cent of
78 the eligible children participating in Early Start CT and enrolled in a
79 child care center, group child care home or family child care home shall
80 be members of a family that is at or below seventy-five per cent of the

81 state median income. No such financial assistance shall be available to
82 (1) any such child care center, group child care home or family child care
83 home unless such center or home has been licensed by the
84 Commissioner of Early Childhood pursuant to section 19a-80 or 19a-87b
85 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, or (2) any such local or
86 regional board of education or regional educational service center
87 unless the preschool program is approved by the Department of
88 Education. The majority of such programs eligible for such financial
89 assistance shall serve children that reside in or attend programs located
90 in priority school districts pursuant to section 10-266p of the general
91 statutes, former priority school districts or towns with schools deemed
92 severe need schools because forty per cent or more of the lunches served
93 are served to students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunches
94 pursuant to federal law. In determining eligibility for financial
95 assistance, the commissioner may consider (A) a community's
96 participation in the state's subsidized child care subsidy program
97 established pursuant to section 17b-749 of the general statutes, and (B)
98 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's social vulnerability
99 index determined by census tract, and such index may include a review
100 of a community's indices of social, economic, racial, ethnic, housing,
101 transportation and household characteristics as determined by the
102 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

103 (b) Any contract entered into under this section shall be made
104 contingent upon available funding and a successful application to a
105 request for proposal issued by the office and informed by the
106 appropriate local governance partner's needs assessment and
107 community plan, as described in section 8 of this act. Any Early Start CT
108 facility that has been approved to operate a child care program financed
109 through the Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority and
110 has received a commitment for debt service from the Department of
111 Social Services, pursuant to section 17b-749i of the general statutes, on
112 or before June 30, 2014, and on or after July 1, 2014, from the office are
113 exempt from the requirement for issuance of requests for proposals.

114 (c) The office, in operating and administering Early Start CT, shall
115 allocate an amount up to five per cent of the total funding for each town
116 or city, or, in the case of a regional application, the participating towns
117 or cities, but not more than seventy-five thousand dollars per town or
118 city, for coordination, program evaluation and administration. Such
119 amount shall be increased by an amount equal to local funding provided
120 for early childhood education coordination, program evaluation and
121 administration, not to exceed twenty-five thousand dollars. Each local
122 governance partner, established pursuant to section 8 of this act, shall
123 designate a staff person to be responsible for such coordination,
124 program evaluation and administration and to act as a liaison between
125 the town and the commissioner.

126 (d) Any program under Early Start CT that receives funds pursuant
127 to this section shall not discriminate based on ancestry, race, color,
128 national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation,
129 religion, learning, physical, intellectual or mental disability or any other
130 protected class described in chapter 814c of the general statutes.

131 (e) No funds received as part of Early Start CT under this section shall
132 be used to supplant federal, state or local funding received for early
133 childhood education on behalf of children in an early childhood
134 education program.

135 (f) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027, the office may pay, in an
136 individual contract entered into under this section, a per-child rate, or
137 an equivalent per-classroom rate, that has been determined by the
138 commissioner. The per-child cost paid by the office under this section
139 for each eligible child enrolled in a program under Early Start CT who
140 is three or four years of age and each child who is five years of age and
141 not eligible to enroll in school, pursuant to section 10-15c of the general
142 statutes, shall be at least ten thousand five hundred dollars for each such
143 child, or paid at an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for
144 eighteen children. For each eligible child who is under the age of three
145 and enrolled in an infant or toddler classroom and not in a preschool

146 classroom, the per-child cost paid by the office shall be at least thirteen
147 thousand five hundred dollars for each such child, or paid at an
148 equivalent rate and amount per classroom of eight children. The office
149 shall use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate
150 and incentivize full enrollment.

151 (g) The office may use up to two per cent of funds allocated to the
152 early care and education appropriation to evaluate program
153 effectiveness and impact on participating children, families and
154 programs, including, but not limited to, child outcomes, later school
155 performance, quality standards, professional development and
156 preparation, and parent engagement impact.

157 Sec. 6. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) Except as otherwise provided
158 in subsection (b) of this section, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026,
159 and each fiscal year thereafter, if funds appropriated to the Office of
160 Early Childhood for Early Start CT are not expended by the
161 Commissioner of Early Childhood, an amount up to one million dollars
162 of such unexpended funds may be available (1) for the provision of
163 professional development for early childhood care and education
164 program providers, and staff employed in such programs, provided
165 such programs accept state funds for infant, toddler and preschool slots,
166 or (2) to support early childhood education programs in satisfying the
167 staff qualifications requirements, provided such programs accept state
168 funds. The commissioner shall determine how such unexpended funds
169 shall be distributed.

170 (b) If any unexpended funds described in subsection (a) of this section
171 are not expended by the office under said subsection (a), the
172 commissioner, with the consent of the Secretary of the Office of Policy
173 and Management, may use such unexpended funds to provide support
174 for purposes that include, but are not limited to, (1) assisting programs
175 in meeting and maintaining accreditation requirements, (2) providing
176 training in implementing preschool assessments and curricula,
177 including training to enhance literacy teaching skills, (3) developing and

178 implementing best practices for parents in supporting preschool and
179 kindergarten student learning, (4) developing and implementing
180 strategies for children to successfully transition to preschool and from
181 preschool to kindergarten, including through parental engagement and
182 whole-family supports that may be utilized through the two-
183 generational initiative, established pursuant to section 17b-112*l* of the
184 general statutes, or through other available resources, and (5) providing
185 for professional development.

186 Sec. 7. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) Any program participating in
187 Early Start CT, including, but not limited to, licensed family child care
188 homes, group child care homes, child care centers and other licensed
189 exempt child care providers and settings, shall be accredited or Early
190 Head Start or Head Start approved not later than three years after
191 entering into a contract with the Office of Early Childhood to serve
192 children under Early Start CT. Any such program that is not accredited
193 shall have an approved program plan not later than twelve months after
194 entering into a contract with the office.

195 Sec. 8. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) There shall be established,
196 within available appropriations, local governance partners to assist in
197 the provision of early care and education in a community under Early
198 Start CT. Two or more towns or school districts and appropriate
199 representatives of groups or entities interested in early childhood
200 education in a region may establish a regional governance partner.

201 (b) The membership of each local governance partner shall reflect the
202 racial, ethnic and socioeconomic composition of the town or region it
203 serves and consist of early care and education stakeholders, including,
204 but not limited to, elected and appointed officials, parents,
205 representatives with expertise in early childhood education, a
206 representative, where applicable, of Smart Start established pursuant to
207 section 10-506 of the general statutes, local education and healthcare
208 providers in the community, a local homeless education liaison,
209 community representatives from a workforce or job training entity and

210 other community representatives who provide services to children.

211 (c) The role and responsibilities of a local governance partner shall
212 include, but are not limited to, (1) conducting and administering a data-
213 driven needs assessment for its respective community or region in
214 accordance with the provisions of subsection (c) of this section, (2)
215 employing strategies to solicit parental engagement and membership,
216 (3) providing periodic technical assistance regarding best practices in
217 early childhood and family engagement for its town or region, (4) jointly
218 sponsoring with the office, professional development opportunities,
219 and (5) ensuring that community outreach is regularly conducted and
220 maintained with community stakeholders.

221 (d) Each local governance partner shall, within available
222 appropriations, conduct a data-driven needs assessment for the town or
223 region in which such partner serves. Such needs assessment may
224 include recommendations for the preferred distribution and allocation
225 of child care spaces within such partner's respective town or region, and,
226 subject to the office's approval, may include a data-driven methodology
227 to reassign child care spaces before the contract date has lapsed. Such
228 needs assessment shall be created by the office in collaboration with
229 communities and shall directly inform, among other things, the
230 assignment of child care spaces across a mixed-delivery system,
231 including, but not limited to, licensed family child care providers, group
232 child care homes, child care centers and license-exempt public schools.

233 (e) Each local governance partner shall employ a staff liaison to aid
234 and support the local governance partner in implementing the
235 provisions of this section. Each staff liaison shall ensure (1) that
236 partnerships are established and fostered among child care providers,
237 (2) that cooperation is maintained with the Office of Early Childhood in
238 monitoring and evaluating child care programs, (3) that existing and
239 potential resources and services available to children and families are
240 identified, (4) facilitation and coordination of efficient, data-driven,
241 delivery of services to children and families, including (A) referral

242 procedures, and (B) before and after school child care for children
243 attending school day, school year programs, (5) the exchange of
244 information with other community organizations serving the needs of
245 children and families, (6) that recommendations are made to school
246 officials concerning transition from child care programs to preschool
247 programs and kindergarten, (7) that effective community engagement
248 strategies are employed to ensure diverse participation, (8) that
249 biannual child assessments, approved by the office, are performed at
250 programs, and conducted in partnership with families, and (9)
251 collaboration with the office related to planning improvements to the
252 state early care and education governance structure.

253 (f) The office shall monitor each local governance partner to ensure
254 compliance with the provisions of this section.

255 Sec. 9. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As part of Early Start CT, the
256 Commissioner of Early Childhood shall establish a state-funded
257 competitive program in which contracts are entered into with nonprofit
258 agencies and local and regional boards of education, which are federal
259 Head Start grantees, to assist in (1) establishing extended-day and full-
260 day, year-round, Head Start programs or expanding existing Head Start
261 programs to extended-day or full-day, year-round programs, (2)
262 enhancing program quality, (3) increasing the number of children
263 served in programs that are both a Head Start program and Early Head
264 Start grantee or delegate, (4) increasing the number of Early Head Start
265 children served above those who are federally funded, and (5)
266 increasing the hours for children currently receiving Early Head Start
267 services. Nonprofit agencies or boards of education seeking contracts
268 pursuant to this section shall make application to the commissioner on
269 such forms and at such times as the commissioner shall prescribe. The
270 commissioner shall include contract provisions that mandate at least
271 twenty-five per cent of the funding for such contracts shall be for the
272 purpose of enhancing program quality. All contracts entered into under
273 this section shall be funded within the limits of available appropriations
274 or otherwise from federal funds and private donations. All Head Start

275 programs funded pursuant to this section shall be in compliance with
276 federal Head Start performance standards.

277 (b) The commissioner may adopt regulations, in accordance with the
278 provisions of chapter 54 of the general statutes, for purposes of this
279 section.

280 Sec. 10. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) Notwithstanding the provisions
281 of sections 4-98, 4-212 to 4-219, inclusive, 4a-51 and 4a-57 of the general
282 statutes, the Commissioner of Early Childhood may, within available
283 appropriations, allocate funds to regional educational service centers for
284 the provision of professional development services, technical assistance
285 and evaluation and program planning and implementation activities,
286 local and regional boards of education, child care centers, group child
287 care homes and family child care homes, as such terms are described in
288 section 19a-77 of the general statutes, and other early childhood care and
289 education entities, as determined by the commissioner. Any funds
290 allocated by the commissioner under this section shall be expended in
291 accordance with procedures and conditions prescribed by the
292 commissioner.

293 Sec. 11. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2024*) For the fiscal years ending June
294 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, the office may pay, in an individual contract
295 entered into under sections 8-210 of the general statutes, as amended by
296 this act, and 10-16p of the general statutes, or a grant awarded pursuant
297 to section 10-16n of the general statutes, as amended by this act, a per-
298 child rate, or an equivalent per-classroom rate, that has been determined
299 by the commissioner. The per-child cost paid by the office under this
300 section for each eligible child enrolled in a program who is three or four
301 years of age and each child who is five years of age and not eligible to
302 enroll in school, pursuant to section 10-15c of the general statutes, shall
303 be at least ten thousand five hundred dollars for each such child, or paid
304 at an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for eighteen children.
305 For each eligible child who is under the age of three and enrolled in an
306 infant or toddler classroom and not in a preschool classroom, the per-

307 child cost paid by the office shall be at least thirteen thousand five
308 hundred dollars for each such child, or paid at an equivalent rate and
309 amount per classroom of eight children. The office shall use data-driven,
310 outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full
311 enrollment.

312 Sec. 12. Subsection (b) of section 8-210 of the 2024 supplement to the
313 general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu
314 thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

315 (b) The state, acting by and in the discretion of the Commissioner of
316 Early Childhood, may enter into a contract with a municipality, a group
317 child care home or family child care home, as described in section 19a-
318 77, a human resource development agency or a nonprofit corporation
319 for state financial assistance in developing and operating child care
320 centers, group child care homes and family child care homes for
321 children disadvantaged by reasons of economic, social or environmental
322 conditions, provided no such financial assistance shall be available for
323 the operating costs of any such child care center, group child care home
324 or family child care home unless it has been licensed by the
325 Commissioner of Early Childhood pursuant to section 19a-80. Such
326 financial assistance shall be available for a program of a municipality, of
327 a group child care home or family child care home, of a human resource
328 development agency or of a nonprofit corporation which may provide
329 for personnel, equipment, supplies, activities, program materials and
330 renovation and remodeling of the physical facilities of such child care
331 centers, group child care homes or family child care homes. Such
332 contract shall provide for state financial assistance, within available
333 appropriations, in the form of a state grant-in-aid (1) for a portion of the
334 cost of such program, as determined by the Commissioner of Early
335 Childhood, if not federally assisted, (2) equal to one-half of the amount
336 by which the net cost of such program, as approved by the
337 Commissioner of Early Childhood, exceeds the federal grant-in-aid
338 thereof, or (3) (A) for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, in an amount
339 not less than [(A)] (i) the per child cost as described in subdivision (1) of

340 subsection (b) of section 10-16q, as amended by this act, for each child
341 in such program that is three or four years of age and each child that is
342 five years of age who is not eligible to enroll in school, pursuant to
343 section 10-15c, while maintaining services to children under three years
344 of age under this section, and [(B)] (ii) thirteen thousand five hundred
345 dollars for each child three years of age or under who is in infant or
346 toddler care and not in a preschool program, and (B) for the fiscal years
347 ending June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, in accordance with the
348 provisions of section 11 of this act. Any such contract entered into on or
349 after July 1, 2022, shall include a provision that at least sixty per cent of
350 the children enrolled in such child care center, group child care home or
351 family child care home are members of families who are at or below
352 seventy-five per cent of the state median income. The Commissioner of
353 Early Childhood may authorize child care centers, group child care
354 homes and family child care homes receiving financial assistance under
355 this subsection to apply a program surplus to the next program year.
356 The Commissioner of Early Childhood shall consult with directors of
357 child care centers in establishing fees for the operation of such centers.
358 For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, the Commissioner of Early
359 Childhood shall, within available appropriations, enter into contracts
360 under this section for the purpose of expanding the number of spaces
361 available to children three years of age or under who are in infant or
362 toddler care and not in a preschool program.

363 Sec. 13. Subdivision (1) of subsection (b) of section 10-16q of the 2024
364 supplement to the general statutes is repealed and the following is
365 substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

366 (b) (1) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, the per child cost of
367 the Office of Early Childhood school readiness program offered by a
368 school readiness provider shall not exceed eight thousand nine hundred
369 twenty-seven dollars. For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2021, to June
370 30, 2024, inclusive, the per child cost of the Office of Early Childhood
371 school readiness program offered by a school readiness provider shall
372 not exceed nine thousand twenty-seven dollars. For the fiscal [year]

373 years ending June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, the per child cost of the
374 Office of Early Childhood full-time school readiness program offered by
375 a school readiness provider shall [not exceed ten thousand five hundred
376 dollars] be in accordance with the provisions of section 11 of this act.

377 Sec. 14. Subsection (b) of section 10-16n of the general statutes is
378 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1,*
379 *2024*):

380 (b) The Office of Early Childhood shall annually allocate to each town
381 in which the number of children under the temporary family assistance
382 program, as defined in subdivision (17) of section 10-262f, equals or
383 exceeds nine hundred children, (1) determined for the fiscal [year] years
384 ending June 30, 1996, to June 30, 2024, inclusive, an amount equal to one
385 hundred fifty thousand dollars plus eight and one-half dollars for each
386 child under the temporary family assistance program, provided such
387 amount may be reduced proportionately so that the total amount
388 awarded pursuant to this subsection does not exceed two million seven
389 hundred thousand dollars, and (2) for the fiscal years ending June 30,
390 2025, and June 30, 2026, an amount determined in accordance with the
391 provisions of section 11 of this act. The office shall award grants to the
392 local and regional boards of education for such towns and nonprofit
393 agencies located in such towns which meet the criteria established
394 pursuant to subsection (a) of this section to maintain the programs
395 established or expanded with funds provided pursuant to this
396 subsection in the fiscal years ending June 30, 1996, and June 30, 1997.
397 Any funds remaining in the allocation to such a town after grants are so
398 awarded shall be used to increase allocations to other such towns. Any
399 funds remaining after grants are so awarded to boards of education and
400 nonprofit agencies in all such towns shall be available to local and
401 regional boards of education and nonprofit agencies in other towns in
402 the state for grants for such purposes.

403 Sec. 15. Subsection (l) of section 19a-87b of the 2024 supplement to the
404 general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu

405 thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

406 (l) For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2022, to June 30, [2026] 2028,
407 inclusive, the Commissioner of Early Childhood may issue a license to
408 maintain a family child care home in New Britain, New Haven,
409 Bridgeport, Stamford, Hartford, Danbury, [or] Waterbury or a town in
410 New London County in accordance with the provisions of this chapter
411 to a person or group of persons who have partnered with an association,
412 organization, corporation, institution or agency, public or private, to
413 provide child care services in a space provided by such association,
414 organization, corporation, institution or agency, provided such space
415 has been approved by the commissioner and is not in a private family
416 home. The commissioner shall not approve more than one facility in
417 each such city to be used for licenses issued under this subsection. An
418 application for a license under this subsection shall include a copy of the
419 current fire marshal certificate of compliance with the Fire Safety Code,
420 and written verification of compliance with the State Building Code,
421 local zoning and building requirements and local health ordinances. The
422 commissioner may require an applicant for a license under this
423 subsection to comply with additional conditions relating to the health
424 and safety of the children who will be served in such facility. The
425 commissioner may waive any requirement that does not apply to such
426 facility. Any license issued under this subsection shall expire on June 30,
427 2026, except that the commissioner may suspend or revoke any such
428 license at any time in accordance with the provisions of section 19a-87e.

429 Sec. 16. Sections 8-210, 10-16n to 10-16r, inclusive, 10-16t, 10-16u, 10-
430 16aa, 10-520b, 17b-749a and 17b-749d of the general statutes are
431 repealed. (*Effective July 1, 2026*)

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 3	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section

Proposed Substitute Bill No. 5051

Sec. 4	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 5	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 6	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 7	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 8	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 9	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 10	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	New section
Sec. 11	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	New section
Sec. 12	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	8-210(b)
Sec. 13	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	10-16q(b)(1)
Sec. 14	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	10-16n(b)
Sec. 15	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	19a-87b(l)
Sec. 16	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	Repealer section