

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5051

Title: AN ACT ESTABLISHING EARLY START CT.

Vote Date: 3/6/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 2/21/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee
Governor Ned Lamont

Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill establishes Early Start CT, a state-funded early care and education program that combines three existing funding streams: School Readiness, Child Day Care, and State Head Start Supplement. This will streamline and simplify the system and reduce administrative burden on providers and families. Additionally, this bill implements a community needs assessment, wherein a staff person will provide technical assistance and professional development to local communities, to expand local governance partners, enhance administrative funding to councils, and inform the OEC to guide funding allotments through the RFP process. This bill also aligns the Qualified Staff Member (QSM) requirements with the national Unifying Framework, establishes the Tri-Share Child Care Matching Program, increases childcare capacity through changes to the licensing ratios for providers, and increases access to childcare for families by increasing the Care 4 Kids income eligibility from 60% to 65% of the State Median Income (SMI).

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Governor, Ned Lamont: expresses support for this bill stating that it will advantage the state in two significant ways: First, it will strengthen the workforce by reducing unemployment and increasing families' economic standing. Second, it will help fulfill children's full academic potential by optimizing their development and long-term emotional health.

[Office of Early Childhood \(OEC\), Commissioner, Beth Bye:](#) expresses support for this bill stating Early Start CT's contract-based program will allow providers to contract directly with the OEC, which streamlines and simplifies the payment process while reducing the administrative burden on providers. Additionally, they state the local needs assessment will be used to create a more efficient and effective mixed delivery system by accurately allocating childcare spaces.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[The following Executive Directors from the RESC Alliance submitted testimony in support of this bill.](#)

They express support for Sect. 11 of this bill stating by granting the OEC the authority to allocate funds directly to RESCs, the services they provide, such as providing technical assistance to early care providers and facilitating school readiness councils to coordinate state funding for the various programs, will be expedited as well as develop additional services.

[ACES, Executive Director, Thomas Danehy, Ed.D.](#)

[CES, Executive Director, Charles Dumais, Ed.D.](#)

[CREC, Executive Director, Freg J. Florio, Ed.D.](#)

[EASTCONN, Executive Director, Eric S. Protulis](#)

[EdAdvance, Executive Director, Jeffrey Kitching, Ed.D.](#)

[LEARN, Executive Director, Katherine Ericson](#)

[CT Business and Industry Association \(CBIA\), Advocacy Outreach Manager, Paul Amarone:](#) expresses support for this bill stating it will bring more affordability and accessibility to parents throughout the state, ultimately keeping more professionals in the workforce at a time when businesses are struggling to retain employees.

[CT Alliance of YMCAs, VP of Government Relations, John Cattelan:](#) expresses support for this bill stating that consolidating the funding stream under Early Start CT will simplify the system and alleviate the administrative burdens on providers. Additionally, they expressed support for the provision of upfront quarterly funding, affirming that it will provide financial stability for childcare centers, which will allow them to plan effectively. They strongly advocate for payment by classroom as opposed to by child; however, they expressed concerns that the bill does not sufficiently address the existing staffing shortages. Moreover, they support the raise in Care 4 Kids income eligibility from 60% to 65% of the SMI, however they expressed concerns that the expanded eligibility may exacerbate existing issues with the Care 4 Kids waiting list and encourages the committee to eliminate the waiting list while simultaneously broadening eligibility criteria.

[Ledyard High School, Student, Riley Depasquale:](#) expresses support for this bill and recommends dedicating the funds to incorporate special education into the current K-12 education system because it will promote inclusivity and improve the lives of those who are hard of hearing/deaf.

[CT Education Association \(CEA\), President, Kate Dias:](#) expresses support for this bill and urge the legislature to focus on attracting well-prepared early childhood educators, supporting age and developmentally appropriate curricula that include play, expanding access toward a

system of universal pre-kindergarten, and enhancing the state's commitment to early childhood and K-12 education for all.

Middletown Public Schools, School Readiness Liaison, Dawn Dubai: expresses support for this bill stating it will simplify the state's early care system and strengthen Middletown's community needs through a strong governance council. However, they express concerns about several areas, including staffing problems and closed classrooms, diminishing quality of staff, high staff turnover, and a lack of available and affordable care.

ConnCAN, Executive Director, Steven Hernandez: expresses support for this bill, highlighting the vital importance of age 0-5 childcare for both the child and the family. They state Early Start CT ensures all young children have the care and support they need and will assist families in planning for their children's education.

Family Centers ECE, ECE Director, Catherine Hogan: expresses support for this bill stating they have had to close classrooms or shorten service hours throughout recent years due to inadequate funding. They state this bill increases much-needed funding to allow crucial ECE programs to pay their staff adequate salaries, which will allow such programs to continue to serve families and children in the state.

Resident, Taylor O'Keefe: expresses support for this bill stating Early Start CT would provide a diverse environment for children, affordable childcare for to all families, and an equal opportunity to all children to learn and prepare for the next stage of their lives.

EC Collaborative of Southington, Executive Director, Joanne Kelleher: expresses support for this bill, specifically highlighting the Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendation to streamline the state-funded early childcare programs into Early Start CT, the increased funding to early childcare, the conversion to per classroom equivalent contracts, the implementation of the regional governance structure at the local level, and the increase in the Care 4 Kids applicant and recipient eligibility to 65% of the state-wide median income. They express concern, however, with how the funding and implementation process will be rolled out in towns like Southington, which do not have an existing School Readiness Council. They also note that Southington does not have any Head Start slots and expresses the desire for additional slots to be allocated to Southington.

Child Care for CT, Parent, Susana Leon: expresses support for this bill and requests the legislature to fund the Blue Ribbon Panel's Plan at the full amount of \$143 million, allocate \$4,500 per child affected by the kindergarten start age change so that parents can afford the additional year of child care in 2024-25, and use the CT Early Childhood Fund as a vehicle for holding additional early education funds.

FRC Alliance, President, Gail Nolan: expresses support for this bill stating families and providers need a more simplified system that will give them more time to do the important work of educating and caring for children – this bill accomplishes that. Also, they state the amount of funding currently in the budget is not enough, but it is a strong start to improve early learning in CT.

City of Norwalk, EC Coordinator, Mary Oster: expresses support for this bill stating the consolidation of the School Readiness, CDC and State Head Start funding streams into one will help to develop a consistent funding plan for CT.

Resident, Katie Russell: expresses support for this bill stating it would provide accessible schooling and resources to children with disabilities and low-income families.

The CT Project Action Fund, Policy & Advocacy Strategist, Coralys Santana: expresses support for this bill stating it addresses crucial aspects of early childhood education and childcare accessibility. They offer recommendations to expand childcare incubators to additional municipalities, enabling current municipalities to open more than one childcare incubator, and eliminating the sunset date while encouraging the OEC to promulgate new licensing regulations for the model.

Friends Center for Children, CCFCT Chair, Allyx Schivone: expresses support for this bill stating it allows families additional access to subsidized programs and support to allow them to thrive, bolstering the economy. They state a strong, robust birth to 3 CT early childhood education system is estimated to bring \$1.2 Billion per year to the state economy.

All Our Kin, Policy Specialist, Jade Thomas: expresses support for this bill stating it will streamline state-funding, increase childcare access for families, and expand opportunities for professional training. Additionally, they state that significant long-term investment is needed to transform the state's childcare system.

Family Centers ECE Programs, Vice President, Yenny Toone: expresses support for this bill and requests the legislature to fully fund the Blue Ribbon Panel's Plan with \$143 million, allocate \$4,500 per affected child due to the kindergarten start age change in 2024-25 to aid parents in affording additional childcare, and utilize the CT Early Childhood Fund to hold additional early education funds.

American Heart Association (AHA), Government Relations Director, Jim Williams: expresses support for this bill stating that the Governors proposed ECE funding will help address outreach, recruitment, and retention of licensed ECE programs and pre-licensure technical assistance. Additionally, they support prioritizing funding to rural areas, child-care deserts, areas with a high proportion of exempt providers, and family childcare homes. They also highlighted research by James Heckman which reported that high-quality early education programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment.

The following childcare providers representing SEIU CSEA Local 2001 submitted testimony in support of this bill.

They highlight the provisions in this bill that increase funding to raise the subsidy income limit from 60% to 65% of the State Median Income.

SEIU CSEA Local 2001, Childcare Provider, Martha Torres
SEIU CSEA Local 2001, Childcare Provider, Iris Velazquez

The following individuals submitted testimony in support of this bill.

They state that the bill provides much needed updates for Care 4 Kids and the early childcare system.

[Resident, Caroline Austin](#)
[Action Early Learning Center, Head Teacher, Kerzell Barnes](#)
[Parent, Jimisah Butler](#)
[Resident, Tori Conway](#)
[Childcare Educator, Sandra Dill](#)
[Miss Dee's Family Daycare Center, Educator, Denisha Dozier](#)
[Bridgeport Prospers, Jayson-Ann Johnson](#)
[Resident, Eimy Martinez](#)
[Resident, Tiffany Morrissey](#)
[Parent, Meredith O'Keefe](#)
[CES, Teaching and Learning Specialist, Liz Parmelee](#)
[Resident, Krista Pisano](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[CTAEYC, ECTC IRR Coordinator, Colleen Brower](#): expresses concern over the new designated qualified staff member (DQSM) staffing requirements for state funded early childhood programs. They state that the staffing requirements are insufficient in ensuring that educators are equipped with the core body of knowledge, skills, values, and experience necessary to deliver a high-level of instruction to children. Instead, they suggest utilizing the Early Childhood Teacher Credential Individual Review Routh (ECTC IRR).

[Special Education Equity for Kids of CT \(SEEK\), Legislative Chair, Andrew Feinstein](#): expresses concerns that this bill fails to effectively integrate the Birth to Three program into the Early Start CT program. They explain that parents of students in Early Intervention are moving to private, full-time pre-K programs without mandated special education services because the special education services from their school district are only offered on a less than full-time basis. They suggest mandating universal, full-day pre-K for all students in Connecticut.

Reported by: James Magson

Date: 4/11/24