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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Beth Bye
Commissioner

**Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood
Before the Public Health Committee
S.B. 986 – An Act Protecting Maternal Health
Monday, March 13, 2023**

Good morning, Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Somers, Representative Klarides-Ditria, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. I am Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am testifying in support of **S.B. 986 – An Act Protecting Maternal Health**.

The Office of Early Childhood supports the Governor’s recommendations in this bill, which seek to protect women’s maternal health. I am expressing my strong support for the language in Section 12 addressing the establishment of a universal newborn home visiting program in Connecticut. We are currently piloting a universal newborn home visiting initiative in Bridgeport to all mothers who give birth in Bridgeport or St. Vincent’s Hospital, using the evidence-based Family Connects model.

We know that helping parents and their children get off to a strong start has both immediate-term and long-term benefits. For example, universal home visiting programs that use Family Connects model nationally, which we are using in the Bridgeport initiative, have 50% fewer emergency room visits, 44% lower DCF investigations of families, 30% reduction in post-partum depression, and a 15% increase in community connections.

This bill requires me, as the Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood, in collaboration with the Commissioners of the Departments of Social Services, Public Health, and the Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy, within available appropriations, to implement a statewide, evidence-based universal newborn home visiting model. A “universal newborn home visiting” program is an evidence-based model in which a registered licensed nurse with specialized training provides services in the home to families with newborns.

As we pilot the initiative in Bridgeport, we will evaluate the impact that early supports have on families. Collaborating with DSS, we will explore leveraging other funding sources like Medicaid. And we will collaborate with community health workers to develop and strengthen community connections beyond the nurse’s early visits.

The bill requires that universal newborn nurse home visiting services is evidence-based and designed to improve outcomes in such areas as child safety, child health and development, family economic self-sufficiency, maternal newborn, and parental health, and others.

The universal newborn home visiting program is voluntary and will be offered to families with a newborn in every community in the state. It will include at least one visit during a newborn's first three months of life or other time frame deemed appropriate and allow families to choose additional visits. The family will receive follow-up visits and information and referrals to services to address each family's individual needs.

Finally, the Commissioners and Executive Director will collaborate to create an evaluation plan to collect and analyze data in order to assess the effectiveness of the program.

Thank you for your time and attention. The OEC is committed to work together—with legislators, the executive branch, providers, advocates, and parents to reduce maternal morbidity/mortality and the social determinants of health that negatively impact our families with young children.

About the OEC

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) advances a two-generation family-centered approach in our pursuit of optimal health, safety and learning outcomes for young children. Through our core programs, we support infant and toddler care, preschool, after-school care, child care and youth camp licensing, home visiting, and early intervention to address developmental delays. The OEC is working toward better coordinated, cost-effective services that support Connecticut's youngest children and families.