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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

Linda Goodman
Acting Commissioner

Testimony of Linda Goodman, Acting Commissioner Office of Early Childhood Before the Education Committee Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Good morning Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am Linda Goodman, Acting Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. I am here to testify on four bills before you today:

- **SB 909** – An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood
- **SB 912**- An Act Concerning Revisions to the Staff Qualifications Requirement for Early Childhood Educators
- **HB 7155** – An Act Requiring the Office of Early Childhood to Develop a Proposed Early Childhood Educator Compensation Schedule
- **HB 7035** – An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendation Concerning Education

SB 909 – An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood is our agency’s technical bill.

Section 1 would establish a grace period for the health physical and immunization records for children whose families are experiencing homelessness. This would allow the child to immediately enroll in an early childhood setting and give the parents adequate time to locate the health physical and immunization records. Families experiencing homeless do not always have immediate access to these types of records. Furthermore, the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) new rules require that states prioritize children whose families are experiencing homelessness for child care services. The Office of Early Childhood included a 90-day grace period provision in its CCDF state plan. The grace period would also align with federal Head Start policy.

Section 2 would provide the OEC Commissioner discretion to approve a request for an application waiver when the request is received following a change in operator or location, therefore, limiting the disruption of care for children. This would be approved in limited cases when warranted.

Section 3 would change the definition of “relative” to align with the new federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) definition. Relative means grandparent, great grandparent, sibling, niece, nephew, aunt, or uncle. Currently, we include cousins.

Phone: (860) 500-4413 · Fax: (860) 326-0554
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 301
Hartford, Connecticut 06103
www.ct.gov/oec

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Section 4 changes the reference to School Readiness administrative funding to “at least 5 percent of the grant allocation.” This change aligns with current practice.

Section 5 would align the School Readiness eligibility period with the phase-out period. Currently, the phase-out period is three years and the eligibility period is five years. They should be aligned to three years.

The OEC has concerns with the language as written in **SB 912 – An Act Concerning Revisions to the Staff Qualifications Requirement for Early Childhood Educators.**

The new language written in SB 912 would allow any individual with any type of bachelor’s degree, plus 12 credits in early childhood education or child development, to meet staff qualification requirements. This would create a disincentive for individuals to complete a full concentration in early childhood education. It could populate the early care and education field with people with no depth of knowledge of child development and no supervised experience through field work or student teaching at the college level.

The Office of Early Childhood would like to emphasize that content, quality and depth of practice knowledge matter when delivering effective early care and education to young children. A review of higher education degree programs is equally important in order to ensure that degree programs assess competency development over time and to provide for rich fieldwork and student teaching experiences working with diverse populations.

The OEC would be amenable to language that would deem out-of-state degree programs “approved” as long as the college is first regionally accredited and then the early childhood program is either accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or CAEP. This means that individuals seeking a lead teacher position coming from an out-of-state institution with these criteria would no longer need to go through the Individual Review Route for a CT Early Childhood Teacher Credential unless they wished to hold the credential.

In Section 1, it would be a mistake to delete “or” because the higher education system has two tracks, one certification and one a degree with a concentration in early childhood education. Removing “or” would eliminate degree options for early childhood teachers.

The OEC appreciates the intent of **SB 7155 – An Act Requiring the Office of Early Childhood to Develop a Proposed Early Childhood Educator Compensation Schedule.** We recognize that the current salary levels for early childhood teachers, both in publicly subsidized and private pay settings, is challenging and it is difficult to retain people in the field. The wages of the early care and education workforce are not unique to Connecticut as demonstrated by national reports

making the case for increasing wages to compensate higher degree attainment and to maintain high-quality early childhood settings.

In the long run, per child state rates must increase to cover the true cost of care, adequately compensate early childhood teachers, provide a high-quality experience, and ultimately improve

outcomes for young children. For state-subsidized spaces, without additional funding, raising the per child rate translates into a significant decrease in spaces.

The OEC, however, does not believe a compensation schedule is necessary. It would be just as effective to look at the cost of care studies that have already been done and use that as a base to determine appropriate levels of compensation for early care and education teachers. In order to develop a compensation schedule, the OEC would need to contract with outside expertise at an added cost. We also want to note that “compensation” suggests both salary and fringe benefits.

We would also note that the state has 11 labor market areas and salaries vary geographically. We would suggest that rather than seeking a recommended “statewide” compensation rate, the standard could be that early childhood teachers who meet the workforce qualifications be paid at a rate commensurate with the local school district. This was what the federal government required in the Preschool Development Grant. As a result, the starting salary for qualified early childhood teachers in the 13 communities participating in this grant is \$41,000, compared to \$24,000 for the pre-k teachers in those communities who are not included in the grant.

Finally, the OEC strongly supports comprehensive background check in Section 28 of **HB 7035 – An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations for Education**. The language is aligned with the new federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) requirements that all states must implement. Background checks are critical to ensure the health and safety of young children in early childhood settings.

Section 28 would require each prospective employee of a child care center, group child care home, of family child care home in a position providing care to a child to submit to comprehensive background checks, including state and national criminal history records checks. It also requires any household member age 16 and older in a family child care home to submit to the same background check. The language states that no prospective employee can have unsupervised access to enrolled children until the background check is completed. The language is responsive to several audits that the Office of Early Childhood has undergone at both the state and federal level.

New language requires that employees must submit to a comprehensive background check every five years. Currently, an employee, and each family child care provider and family member, must submit to a new background check each time he or she changes employment. An employee or family child care provider could potentially undergo and pay for several background checks within a five-year period. On the other hand, an employee or family child care provider and family member that remains in the same employment or holds the same license for 20 years will never undergo another background check. This language is good for safety reasons and a positive improvement for employees.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.