



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of  
Early Childhood

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**Testimony of Myra Jones-Taylor, Ph.D., Commissioner  
Office of Early Childhood  
Before the Education Committee  
Re: H.B. 5306 – An Act Concerning Recommendations of the  
Office of Early Childhood  
S.B. 176 – An Act Concerning the Smart Start Program  
S.B. 278 – An Act Concerning the Legislative Commissioner’s Recommendations for  
Technical Revisions to the Education and Early Childhood Statutes  
Wednesday, February 24, 2016**

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Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am Myra Jones-Taylor, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood.

I am testifying today in support of **H.B. 5306 – An Act Concerning Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood**. This bill addresses several OEC functions and programs including Care4Kids, criminal background checks, licensing, Accreditation Facilitation Project, Birth to Three, membership on the home visiting consortium and school readiness councils, and technical changes. The 12 sections of the bill are explained in this testimony.

**Section 1** would increase the Care4Kids income cap from 75 to 85 percent of the State Median Income (SMI). This would allow a household initially enrolled in the program with an income at 50 percent of SMI or below to remain eligible for Care4Kids for up to one year as long as income does not exceed 85 percent of SMI. This is required by the federal Child Care Development Block Grant Reauthorization.

**Section 2** would require criminal background checks for newly hired OEC staff who have access to FBI information and who regularly visit child care facilities. This would apply to new staff hired in the OEC licensing division.

**Section 3** would require a licensed person or entity who seeks to change the operator, ownership, or location of a licensed child care center or group child care home, without filing a new license application, to submit a request to the commissioner prior to the anticipated change.

**Section 4 and 5** would remove the licensure exemption for drop-in early care and education

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programs and youth camps administered by a nationally chartered Boys & Girls Club

Children served by unlicensed exempt programs do not benefit from the same level of health and safety protection offered through licensing activities to children participating in licensed programs. Licensing of these programs will ensure oversight of minimum health and safety standards in critical areas such as abuse and neglect, staff-child ratios, staff qualifications, health care, educational requirements and physical plant safety. Licensing these programs will expand the OEC's ability and authority to investigate the complaints it has been receiving from parents and other interested stakeholders regarding the health and safety of children served in these programs. These drop-in programs serving thousands of young children and youth are currently not required to meet the basic requirements that all licensed programs are required to meet.

My staff met with representatives of the Boys and Girls Club to discuss removing the exemption and listen to their perspective. We understand there are challenges in meeting the licensing requirements that other after school programs, many of which serve low-income children, manage to meet each year. The OEC must balance serving children in need of care, the capacity of the provider to meet licensing requirements, and ultimately ensuring the fundamental health and safety of every child. We continue to receive complaints about the Boys and Girls Club providers and our ability to respond to the unlicensed programs is limited to whether or not it's operating illegally as a drop-in program. The investigation of the actual allegations raised by concerned parents resides outside our authority.

We know the Boys and Girls Club serves our poorest children. Their parents should be guaranteed the same basic standards of health and safety that moderate and high-income parents enjoy every day when they send their children to licensed care away from the home. Their poverty must not be a justification for them to receive less. The OEC will continue to have a dialogue with the Boys and Girls Club on this issue.

**Section 6** would amend language governing the OEC Accreditation Facilitation Project (AFP). When the original language was written, AFP was funded by the Department of Social Services and was organized around the five DSS regions. The OEC does not have regions and we have centralized AFP.

**Section 7** would add Birth to Three in the OEC successor department language under Section 10-500(d). The Birth to Three Program was transferred from the Department of Developmental Services to the OEC in the 2016 legislative session, and therefore, needs to be acknowledged as an official entity within the OEC.

**Section 8** adds the Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program Director and two additional Home Visiting program models to the Home Visiting Consortium, which was created under Public Act 15-45. The federal MIECHV grant requires state grantees to have a MIECHV State Advisory Council with the Program Director as a member. To avoid duplication, the Home Visiting Consortium also serves the role of the MIECHV State Advisory Council. The addition of two more home visiting models provides more comprehensive representation of home visiting models in Connecticut.

**Section 9** adds the McKinney-Vento Local Liaison to the School Readiness Council under Section 10-16r(a). This was one of the policy recommendations of the CT Early Childhood Cabinet subcommittee on Families with Young Children without Homes to the Early Childhood Cabinet. Having the McKinney-Vento Local Liaison serve on the local School Readiness Council will help raise awareness about the needs of children experiencing homelessness.

**Section 10** authorizes the OEC to enter into stipulations, agreements, memoranda of understanding, interim consent orders or consent orders in regard to child care service licensing matters. This clarifies the Commissioner's authority to enter into various types of agreements to address and resolve matters under the Commissioner's jurisdiction, in a manner that is mutually agreeable to the parties, and to avoid the expense and use of resources in enforcement or legal proceedings in certain cases.

**Section 11** removes reference to "Section 17b-734, section (b) of Section 17b-736" from CGS Section 51-164n(b) as it is obsolete and repealed in section 12 below.

**Section 12** repeals Section 17b-734, 17b-735, and 17b-736. These statutes are obsolete.

The Office of Early Childhood has concerns with one change in **S.B. 176 – An Act Concerning the Smart Start Program**. Section 1(b) would decrease the percentage of Smart Start preschool spaces for children in households earning at or below 75 percent of the State Median Income from 60 to 50 percent. In these economic times with shrinking budgetary resources, it is imperative that we prioritize early childhood services to those families who need them the most. Additionally, the OEC is striving to streamline and align our early care and education programs. Currently, the priorities of Smart Start are aligned with our School Readiness and Child Day Care Center programs. This change would create misalignment and move us away from streamlining our agency functions.

The Office of Early Childhood supports **S.B. 178 - An Act Concerning the Legislative Commissioner's Recommendations for Technical Revisions to the Education and Early Childhood Statutes**. This is a technical bill that changes references to child care services to align with changes made in the early childhood licensing statutes.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am here to listen to your thoughts and answer any questions.