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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

Beth Bye
Commissioner

**Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner
Office of Early Childhood
Before the Education Committee
SB 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, and 937
Wednesday, March 6, 2019**

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Rep. McCarty and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. I am here today to testify concerning six bills addressing early childhood issues.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood advances a family-centered approach to support young children and their families. 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. OEC is working toward better coordinated, cost-effective services that supports Connecticut's youngest children and families.

The bills before you are of utmost importance. Five of the six bill address early childhood workforce wages and staff qualifications, and Care 4 Kids rates and eligibility. We agree with the intent of these bills, and while current appropriations do not meet their ultimate goals, we want to work collaboratively with you and the early childhood field to address these pressing concerns.

SB 930 – An Act Concerning the Creation of a Pilot Program for an Early Childhood Incubator Model. This bill would establish a pilot program in four communities to allow licensed family child care providers to work in an incubator, shared space. The providers would still abide by family child care licensing requirements even though they are not located in a residence.

We support this innovative concept and want to work with the bill proponents to clarify and refine the language as written. We suggest that language needs to:

- Include requirements for approvals by local officials to ensure that the facilities utilized are healthy and safe for children;
- Authorize the Commissioner to use discretion in the implementation of this pilot provision and the application of existing family child care licensing regulations to these programs;
- Limit the pilot to one facility per community;
- Clarify that the licenses issued cease after June 30, 2024.

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Additionally, language in lines 76-84 are unnecessary, as current statutes for licensed group family child care homes already permit this.

SB 931 – An Act Concerning Payments to Child Care Providers. This bill increases Care 4 Kids provider rates to the 75th percentile of market rate. Our long-term goal is raise Care 4 Kids rates to this level to better reflect early childhood providers’ skills and to pay a more fair and just wage. The Office of Early Childhood has put forth a Child Care Development Plan (CCDF) plan that raises preschool-age rates to at least the 25% of market rate and infant rates to at least 50% of market rate. This is a start toward meeting the federal government’s benchmark of the 75th percentile of a state’s market rate.

The bill also raises rates for School Readiness by \$1,000 to \$9,827 and treats rates for Child Day Care Centers the same. The bill stipulates that the entire rate increase must go to provider wages. Again, we support the intent of this bill; however, current budget appropriations are not available to cover this increased cost and serve as many families. The choice would be to then serve fewer families at the higher rate.

SB 932 – An Act Concerning Staff Qualifications for Early Childhood Educators. This bill moves out the staff qualifications compliance dates for state-funded early care and education programs. We are well aware that the current funding levels do not lead to increased teacher compensation for those who meet the current staff qualification benchmarks.

Research shows that higher early childhood staff qualifications yield higher quality programs. The Office of Early Childhood acknowledges that fundamental pieces need to be addressed to realistically meet the staff qualifications goal, including additional higher education scholarship dollars, increased access to colleges, and better compensation.

SB 933 – An Act Expanding Eligibility for Certain Families in the Care 4 Kids Program. This bill would raise Care 4 Kids income eligibility from 50 to 75 percent of the state medium income. Again, we support the intent of this goal. Raising income eligibility to this level would help support the families described as ALICE families – Asset, Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. The current appropriations does not support this change in income eligibility. If applied, the choice would be to serve fewer families.

SB 934 – An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care 4 Kids Program to Parents Enrolled in Other Types of Schools. This bill would expand eligibility to parents enrolled in learning activities, including high school, adult education and higher education. While we support the this goal of moving low-income parents up the education ladder, previous cost estimates make this unattainable given the state’s budget constraints.

SB 935 – An Act Requiring the Office of Early Childhood to Develop an Early Childhood Compensation Schedule. We simply need to start paying early childhood teachers more. Developing a compensation schedule would require additional fiscal and staff resources to answer a question that will yield what we already know. Early care and education teachers are not paid enough for the work they do. They should be paid on par with other educational professionals.

SB 937 – An Act Concerning a Student Loan Forgiveness Program for Early Childhood Educators. A loan forgiveness program would provide a financial relief incentive for people to enter the early childhood field, complete their degrees, and stay in the field. This is a smart workforce and economic development strategy that we should strive for in the long term. This is not reflected in the current budget, however.

In closing, I want to thank the Education Committee for raising these six important early childhood bills and for its long-standing investment in our youngest children and their families.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer your questions now and/or at a later date. I am committed to work together – with legislators, the executive branch, providers, advocates and parents - to better serve our families with young children.