

# Office of Early Childhood Legislative Summary 2014

*For more information, contact:  
Maggie Adair, Director, Government & Community Relations  
[Maggie.Adair@ct.gov](mailto:Maggie.Adair@ct.gov), 860-713-6413*

Early childhood policy took center stage during the 2014 legislative session. Legislation passed to statutorily create the Office of Early Childhood, expand School Readiness opportunities for 1,020 children, increase Care4Kids rates for the first time in 13 years, approve a child care collective bargaining agreement, increase rates for School Readiness and Child Day Care Centers, and establish a grant program to allow for preschool expansion in public schools. Below is a brief outline of major early childhood bills that passed this session.

**House Bill 5562 (Public Act 14-39) – An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood, Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education and Concerning Dyslexia and Special Education.** This bill statutorily establishes the Office of Early Childhood, expands School Readiness opportunities, moves to annual inspections of family child care homes and centers, and requires the Office of Early Childhood to develop a plan to achieve universal access to preschool. (See the two-page fact sheet for more details.)

**House Bill 25 (Public Act 14-41) – An Act Establishing the Smart Start Program.** This bill requires the Office of Early Childhood to design and administer a competitive grant program to allow for public schools to create or expand preschool opportunities. (See the two-page fact sheet more for details.)

**House Bill 5596 (Public Act 14-47) – An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015.** This is the budget bill. Below are highlights of the OEC budget:

- Expansion of 1,020 School Readiness preschool slots in the Priority and Competitive School Districts and Alliance Districts.
- Rate increase from \$8,346 to \$8,670 for full-day School Readiness programs.
- 3% rate increase for state-funded Child Day Care Centers.
- \$8.5 million in funding for the child care collective bargaining agreement, which provides rate increases, professional development opportunities, and other incentives for licensed family child care providers and family, friend and neighbor providers accepting Care4Kids subsidies.
- \$2.8 million in funding for a 3% Care4Kids rate increase for licensed child care centers accepting Care4Kids.
- \$1.3 million in funding for quality enhancements and Accreditation Facilitation Project.
- In addition to the existing 73 General Fund staff, a total of 40 new positions are added in the budget: 28 staff for licensing to allow for annual child care inspections and increase capacity to process background checks; 4 staff for a quality improvement system; 3 staff for the Smart Start Program; and 2 staff to improve internal capacity.
- Funding for remaining OEC programs is maintained.

- Carry-forward funding will support the following: creation of a statewide universal pre-k plan, local and regional planning grants; and start-up costs for additional preschool classrooms/slots.

**Senate Bill 29 (P.A. 14-98) – An Act Authorizing and Adjusting Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements, Transportation and other Purposes.** This is the omnibus bonding bill, which includes bonding and grants-in-aid for early childhood. The bill includes:

- Bond authorizations in a Smart Start Competitive Grant Account to be administered by the Office of Early Childhood. \$100 million in bonding is allocated for 10 years (\$15 million in the first year and \$10 million each year after) for the purpose of allowing public schools to renovate existing classrooms to make them appropriate for preschool classrooms. This is a non-lapsing account, which means unspent funding can accumulate.
- Grants-in-aid for facility improvements and minor capital repairs for School Readiness and Child Day Care Center programs. A maximum of \$10 million is allocated for Fiscal Year 15, \$11.5 million for Fiscal Year 16, and \$15 million for Fiscal Year 17.

**House Bill 5597 (P.A. 14-217) – An Act Implementing Provisions of the State Budget for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2015.** This is the large implementer bill that is usually passed in the House and the Senate in the final days of the session. The following early childhood provisions are included in this bill:

- Section 117 requires SDE to submit a report on the pilot study for early literacy to both the Appropriations and Education committees by October 1, 2016.
- Language also passed in Senate Bill 424 is included in Sections 132 and 133 – see details about SB 424 later in this document.
- Funding for operational costs of the Smart Start Program is included in Section 138 - \$10 million each year from the Tobacco Settlement for Fiscal Year 16 through Fiscal Year 25.
- Language for the Child Care Union contract between CSEA-SEIU Local 2001 and the Office of Early Childhood is included in Section 167.
- Language directing the Commission on Children to develop a two-generational plan that will address intergenerational barriers to school readiness and workforce readiness is included in Section 198.
- Language in Section 224 establishes a new Priority Group 7 in the Care4Kids program for families whose children participate in a program funded by the federal Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership grant. This new Priority Group would comply with Early Head Start criteria as well as extend redetermination from 8 to 12 months.

**Senate Bill 106 (P.A. 14-172) – An Act Concerning Improving Employment Opportunities Through Education and Ensuring Safe School Climates.** Language is included in this bill that allows the Office of Early Childhood to offer a competitive grant, in collaboration with the State Department of Education, for up to three Alliance School Districts to develop and implement a strategy to promote the social and emotional well-being and health of children from age three to third grade. The program must focus on instructional tools and family engagement. Funds for this grant may come from public, private, federal, or philanthropic sources.

**Senate Bill 322 (P.A. 14-115) – An Act Connecting the Public to Behavioral Health Care Services.** Requires the Office of the Health Care Advocate to establish an information and referral service to help resident and providers receive behavioral health care information, timely referrals, and access to care. In developing the service, the OCA will collaborate with United Way 211, the Behavioral Health Care Partnership, community collaboratives, and providers.

**Senate Bill 424 (P.A. 14-22) – An Act Concerning Access to Preschool Programs for Children in the Care of the Department of Children and Families.** This bill requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF), in consultation with the Office of Early Childhood, to adopt policies and procedures that maximize enrollment of children, who are placed in out-of-home care by DCF, in eligible preschool programs. The bill also requires the Department of Children and Families, in consultation with the Office of Early Childhood, to submit a report to the Legislature concerning children birth to age 5 placed in out-of-home care by DCF who need access to early childhood services.

**Senate Bill 425 (P.A. 14-212) – An Act Concerning the State Education Resource Center.** This bill establishes the State Education Resource Center (SERC ) as a quasi-public agency created to act on behalf of the state. SERC provides early childhood technical assistance and training.

**House Bill 5040 (P.A. 14-186) – An Act Concerning the Department of Children and Families and the Protection of Children.** Language is included in this bill that requires paid youth camp directors and assistant directors to be Mandated Reporters. The bill also imposes a deadline by which DCF must report the results of an abuse or neglect investigation of an employee of a private school or a public or private child care facility or institution and (2) eliminates the five-day period in which the school, facility, or institution must, based on the commissioner's findings and recommendations, suspend the staff member.

**House Bill 5146 (Public Act 14-15) – An Act Concerning the Use of Public School Health Assessment Forms by Youth Camps and Day Care Centers.** This bill allows licensed youth camps, child or group day care facilities, and family day care homes to use a child's physical examination required for school purposes and either his or her school health assessment form or State Department of Education early childhood health assessment record form to satisfy any physical examination or health status certification they require.

**House Bill 5323 (P.A. 14-132) – An Act Concerning the Child Poverty and Prevention Council.** The bill adds the following to the Council: housing commissioner, agriculture commissioner, and executive director of the Office of Early Childhood. (Note: In HB 5562, the head of the Office of Early Childhood is retitled to “commissioner.”)

**House Bill 5559 (Public Act 14-38) – An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Uniform Regional School Calendar Task Force, Licensure Exemptions for Certain After School Programs, and Expanding Opportunities Under the Subsidized Training and Employment Program.** Language is included in this bill that expands an existing child care service licensing exemption to apply to any child care service that a municipal agency or department administers rather than those only located in a public school building. For example, this language would

allow public schools, under the Smart Start Program, to operate a public preschool in a community-based setting and remain exempt from licensing requirements.