



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 Children’s Committee

Re: SB 10 – An Act Increasing Access to Child Care For Children Who Are Homeless
Tuesday, February 16, 2016

Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban, and distinguished members of the Children’s Committee. I am Myra Jones-Taylor, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. I am here today to testify before this committee in strong support of S.B. 10 – An Act Increasing Access to Child Care For Children Who Are Homeless. S.B. 10 would change two early childhood policies to ensure children experiencing homelessness, as defined by the McKinney Vento Act, have easier access to child care services. I applaud the Governor for putting this important legislation forward and I am proud to stand as his partner in this endeavor.

The Governor’s proposal mirrors the policy recommendation that was part of the report to the Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet, “Homeless Families with Young Children Policy Package.” The Cabinet created a working group to examine the status of families with young children experiencing homelessness, the impact of trauma on young children, and the barriers that families with young children face. The working group submitted the report to the Cabinet for review and acceptance in the fall of 2015.

Under the McKinney-Vento definition, homeless children and youth are individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence. It includes children living in emergency homeless shelters, motels or hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds, cars, abandoned buildings, bus or train stations, sharing housing with others, and foster children awaiting placement.

Families with children under age 6 are the fastest growing population of the homeless population in the United States. In Connecticut, an estimated 3,000 to 9,000 families with young children are homeless under the McKinney-Vento definition. Of that estimate, approximately 1,125 families experienced homelessness in 2015 with 2,022 children impacted. Of those children, 43 percent were under the age of 5 and 42 percent were between the ages of 5 and 12.

The first policy change would make children who are homeless categorically eligible for the child care subsidy, regardless of a parent’s work status by allowing the Commissioner of Early Childhood to designate them as in need of “protective services” within the Care4Kids program.

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Often, families experiencing homelessness lack employment, which under current policy, would make non-Temporary Family Assistance families ineligible for a child care subsidy. This policy would eliminate that barrier to safe and stable child care.

The report to the Connecticut Early Childhood Cabinet addressed the traumatic situation for children and families experiencing homelessness. The report stated: “Inadequate housing and the accompanying instability is traumatic for the family, but particularly detrimental for the long-term health and development of a young child. During the first five years, brain development is at its peak and stability, safe and a nurturing environment is critical to supporting children to build healthy social-emotional behaviors as well as intellectual abilities.”

Providing access to child care is one critical strategy to build stability in a child’s life and mitigate the effects of trauma. By providing access to the Care4Kids child care subsidy, children can be assured of a safe and stable child care experience across the state in a variety of settings, including center-based and home-based care.

The second policy shift would create a 90-day grace period for providing documentation of health and immunization records when enrolling in a child care center, group children care home, or family child care home. Often, families experiencing homelessness do not have easy access to these records. This policy change would ensure a child has immediate access to child care services in these high-quality settings. Every year since 1996, Connecticut has ranked in the top five states in the nation for on-time childhood immunizations. We are consistently well above the national average and feel that this 90-day grace period to provide documentation would not impose any undue risk.

Both of these policy shifts would not only ensure access to a safe and stable early care and education setting, but also allow a parent the time to seek housing and other services and to secure employment.

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