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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Beth Bye
Commissioner

Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner Office of Early Childhood Before the Appropriations Committee

**H.B. 5005 - An Act Adjusting The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2021
Thursday, February 13, 2020**

Good morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Rep. Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. I am here today to testify concerning the Governor's FY20-21 proposed budget for the agency.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood advances a two-generation family-centered approach in our pursuit of optimal health, safety and learning outcomes for young children. Through core our 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 support Connecticut's youngest children and families.

The Governor's budget proposal continues Connecticut's investment in high-quality early childhood services administered by the Office of Early Childhood. This budget maintains funding, as the Governor proposed in his FY20-21 budget, for Smart Start, Nurturing Families Network, Head Start Services, Even Start, 2Gen, and Child Care Quality Enhancements.

I will summarize changes in the agency budget that either expand, delay, or reduce funding.

Birth to Three funding is increased by \$2,952,229 to cover the projected number of children eligible and enrolled for services. We are seeing an upward trend of children served in part due to enhanced screening and increased awareness about the need to catch developmental delays as early as possible. Early intervention pays off in the long run, mitigating the need for and costs of special education and over the long term.

The Governor's budget expands vital funding in the amount of \$1,364,772 for the Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) program. The federally funded program combines aspects of Early Head Start and high-quality child care to provide comprehensive and continuous services to low-income families with infants and toddlers. Integrating Early Head Start comprehensive services and resources into the array of traditional child care and family child care settings creates new opportunities to improve outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their

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families. This program supports services at TEAM Inc. in Naugatuck, LULAC Head Start in New Haven, and the United Way of Greater New Haven.

In Connecticut, the EHS-CCP federal grant program model is heavily reliant upon the layering of state child care funds. The \$1,364,772 in the Governor's budget represents approximately 25% of the total program budget. The rest is federal. Without the state funding, program grantees report that of the existing 232 slots currently funded with federal and state support, 95 slots would be eliminated.

The School Readiness and Child Day Care program rate increases to \$9,027 per child is delayed to FY22 for a savings of \$2.7 million. We understand that raising rates to compensate early childhood teachers with a modest pay boost is of critical importance; unfortunately, this rate adjustment is delayed due to budget constraints.

There are two reductions in the Governor's budget. A one-time, two-year contract to EdAdvance is eliminated in the second year for a savings of \$50,000. This contract, about to be executed for this fiscal year, will fund nutrition services, professional development, and general support to the Danbury School Readiness Council. In addition, \$600,000 is reduced for early care and education staff scholarships. The agency has the fiscal capacity to provide sufficient scholarship services for FY21, taking into account this reduction.

It is important to recognize that the Office of Early Childhood recently won a highly competitive federal Preschool Development Grant grant award of \$26.8 million over a three-year period that will support systems improvement, Birth to Five collaborations, and improved outcomes through a 2Gen, family-centered and strength-based approach. This federal grant builds upon the two previous PDG grants that the OEC has received – last year's \$8.5 million award and the \$49 million award spanning FY16-FY20. We are very proud of the work we have accomplished through these PDG grant opportunities and will continue progress with this new grant award.

In closing, I want to thank the Appropriations Committee 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. Our agency is committed to work together to better serve young children and their families.