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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 Committee on Children
H.B. 5698 – An Act Concerning the Collection and Reporting of
Adverse Childhood Experiences Data
March 2, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, Senator Martin, Representative Dauphinais and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. I am Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am here today to testify concerning **H.B. 5698 – An Act Concerning the Collection and Reporting of Adverse Childhood Experiences Data**.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events occurring before a person reaches 18. ACEs include abuse and neglect, parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence. ACEs can have a lifelong impact on the trajectory in an individual's life.

I would like to share with you information about a \$1.5 million three-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that focuses on preventing adverse childhood experiences recently awarded to the OEC. Connecticut was one of 5 applicants selected in a highly competitive process for this Data to Action grant. One of the main foci of the grant is to enhance the real-time data collection of ACEs and resilience metrics to track improvements in the well-being of child mental health. The OEC has partnered with the University of Connecticut, the Center for Prevention, Evaluation and Statistics, and its many local partners to begin developing this data system.

The ACEs data will be drawn from a variety of sources. CT Department of Public Health's (DPH) Connecticut School Health Survey will be enhanced to ask core ACEs questions to Connecticut youth in grades 9-12. In addition, administrative data will be leveraged to develop ACES burden estimates by tracking data such as:

- chronic absenteeism and preschool sanctions
- incarcerated adults with children
- children / families experiencing homelessness (HMIS)
- domestic violence reports (CTAADV)

Aggregate, community-level data will be made available through the CTDATA portal that will support broad community awareness about this issue. Critically, this process will take an equity lens by engaging communities and a broad coalition of partners.

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The data will be used to:

- engage communities in telling their data stories related to ACEs and protective factors;
- support child mental health through engagement with the child behavioral health plan; and
- inform the development of policies that support family resilience.

In addition to the data-systems innovation, this grant supports the implementation of three evidence-based prevention strategies to strengthen families and prevent ACEs:

- increased uptake of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and family financial literacy;
- promotion of social norms around child resilience and nurturing family relationships through innovative social media campaign;
- increased trauma-informed and ACEs aware training for DCF, OEC, and DDS providers.

This grant will afford Connecticut the opportunity to leverage cutting-edge data techniques to promote greater knowledge about ACEs and inform policies to support child mental health. The potential impact of reducing childhood adverse experiences cannot be overstated. A recent study by Connecticut's Office of Health Strategy found that a reduction in ACEs could save Connecticut Medicaid between \$1.1 to 1.9 billion between 2021 – 2030. The OEC and its partners hope to reduce ACEs through this grant and beyond.

In closing, the OEC, in consultation with SDE, has not yet developed a new preschool experience survey. We are committed to implement an optimal tool that helps professionals assess a child's development to better meet the needs of each child as they enter school to continue a path of lifelong social emotional growth and learning.

Thank you for giving me the time to testify.

About the OEC

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) advances a two-generation family-centered approach in our pursuit of optimal health, safety and learning outcomes for young children. 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. The OEC is working toward better coordinated, cost-effective services that support Connecticut's youngest children and families.