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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 Committee on Children**

### **SB. 2 – An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children March 9, 2021**

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Good afternoon Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, Senator Martin, Representative Dauphinais and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. My name is Beth Bye. I am Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am here today to testify concerning SB. 2 – An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children.

S.B. 2 would require the OEC to develop and implement a plan to expand the Birth to Three System to provide early intervention services for children five years of age and under. The bill also requires the elimination of parent fees for Birth to Three services.

Birth to Three provides support to families with infants and toddlers with significant developmental delays or who have a diagnosed condition that has a high likelihood of resulting in a developmental delay. The system falls under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Supports typically occur in a natural learning environment for the family and child, such as the home or another community setting. This approach bolsters the natural learning that occurs throughout the day and equips the parents with resources to support their child's on-going development.

The Connecticut Birth to Three System was fully implemented in 1993, and in 2016, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) became the lead agency. Services are delivered by 19 contracted Early Intervention Service (EIS) programs operated by 18 parent agencies.

Birth to Three is a tremendously popular system of supports with positive child and family outcomes and positive feedback from parents who have or have had their children enrolled in the program. The system offers parent choice – supports are offered in the home, in a child's child care setting, or at a mutually agreed upon location, and at a time that is convenient for the parent.

The program is centered around the family with an intentional focus on family engagement. The staff work to empower parents to support their children development, understanding that the parents are with the children most of the time.

When a child turns three years of age, if they are determined eligible for Part B services, the child and family transition to public school preschool special education services. These services are most often located in the public school settings on set days, and on a part-time basis. There are some notable exceptions, like Wintonbury Magnet School in Bloomfield where children receive five days of preschool, with interventions delivered in the full-time preschool classroom. For some families, this transition has challenges, as they have been accustomed to family supports in a home setting or delivered at their child's child care at time convenient for them and their schedules.

For these reasons, under P.A. 19-184, a Preschool Education Working Group was convened to discuss the challenges in transitioning children from Birth to Three to special education services provided by public school. Rep. McCarty was a participant in these meetings and the legislator who asked for this study. The group was comprised of community providers, Birth to Three programs, Local Education Agency's (LEAs), state agencies, and the general public. The report can be found [here](#).

The Preschool Education Working Group provided the following recommendations:

1. Require an ASQ be completed for students found not eligible for Part B.
2. Encourage all communities to create an early childhood liaison position.
3. Consider additional data collection for monitoring children found not eligible for Part B services.
4. Monitor collaboration between community-based programs and LEAs specifically with regard to referrals of children who had received Birth to Three and found not eligible for Part B services.
5. Allow families who have children turning 3 in the months from May to August to choose to remain in their current Birth to Three programs until the start of the following school year or receive services from the LEA through Part B. This would require additional fiscal resources.

At this time, we feel a plan to expand to a Birth to Five system is premature. The recommendations of the Preschool Education Working Group should be the place to start. The OEC is committed to continue this work and is happy to engage in further discussion with the Committee on Children.

This bill also proposes to eliminate family cost participation (FCP) fees. These fees were implemented in 2003. Birth to Three programs bill commercial insurance and Medicaid. If a family's annual income is \$45,000 or more, the family is responsible for a monthly fee. This monthly fee is in addition to any money insurance, state, and federal funding that pay for Birth to Three services. State and federal funds cover about 80% of early intervention services; health insurance and the family fee cover the remaining 20%. The fee is a barrier for some families receiving services.

The pre-COVID revenue to the state from Family Cost Participation fees was approximately \$1.2 million annually. The cost to remove this funding source was not included in the Governor's FY22-23 budget.

Thank you for giving me the time to testify.

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### **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.