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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 Appropriations Committee**

**H.B. 6439 - An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023,  
And Making Appropriations Therefor  
Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

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Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Rep. France; subcommittee members, Senator McCrory, Rep. Felipe, Senator Somers, and Rep. Kathleen McCarty; and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. I am here today to testify in support of the Governor's FY22-23 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 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. 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. We look forward to continuing our work with the Governor, our sister agencies, and all of you here in the Legislative Branch to achieve these goals.

The past 12 months have been like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an acute impact on our daily lives. Family situations have been upended as they struggle with lost lives, unemployment, food and housing insecurity, disrupted learning, and loss of child care. The child care industry, in Connecticut and across the nation, is fiscally fragile due to lower enrollments, ratio constraints, increased health and safety costs, and staffing challenges. We have utilized our state and federal resources to try to stabilize the industry and respond to families' needs throughout the crisis. Our home visiting and Birth to Three programs have been successful in working with families and children largely through remote services.

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Governor Lamont recognizes that child care is an integral component of our economy, enabling parents to go to work and providing a nurturing learning environment for our youngest citizens. He has made it a priority to support child care providers, who have served as dedicated front-line workers since the COVID outbreak last spring. With this executive branch's support and both \$23 million in federal response and relief aid and over \$90 million in state funding, the OEC has responded to this crisis by standing up multiple CTCARES initiatives to address the struggles of families and children, frontline workers, and child care workers. We have recently received an additional \$71 million in new federal response and relief funding and are developing an operational plan to stabilize the child care industry and support families as we work through and emerge from this historic public health emergency. I am happy to provide you with information about the scope of our effort today and in the committee work group.

The Governor's budget proposal increases funding for the Early Care and Education (ECE) line item (School Readiness and Child Day Care) in each fiscal year to annualize the minimum wage increase for providers. The Governor's budget maintains funding of \$6.2 million in the ECE account in order to maintain the Governor's commitment to maintaining support for child care at pre-pandemic levels. These funds are lapsing in FY 21 due to the pandemic's impact on child care enrollment and centers' capacity.

The Governor's budget restores \$1.4 million in each fiscal year 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 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 \$1.4M in the Governor's budget represents approximately 25% of the total program budget. The remaining funds are federal dollars.

Birth to Three funding is increased by \$1 million in FY23 to cover the projected number of children eligible and enrolled for services. While service levels are lower due to COVID-19, we anticipate the historic upward trend will continue as the pandemic abates.

The Governor's budget also maintains funding for Nurturing Families Network, Even Start, and 2Gen. Funding is reduced by \$476,876 for State Head Start Services to reflect statewide declines in enrollment, by \$900,503 for Child Care Quality Enhancements, and by \$75,000 to reflect the closure of one Smart Start Classroom .

The Committee has requested that state agencies provided staffing data. Our current FTE is 108 state and federally funded positions (Source: STARS report). Our current state funded Personal

Services count is 118 positions. As our state funding allotment does not support the total 118 positions, the OEC has been resourceful in leveraging federal funds to support critical positions in the agency.

State-funded positions total 87.4 FTE, with 20.6 vacancies, and 8 vacancies currently in recruitment. Those 8 positions are: Administrative Assistant; Information Technology Manager 2; Information Technology Analyst 3; Grants and Contracts Specialist; Social Services Program Administration Manager; Associate Fiscal/Administrative Officer; Fiscal/Administrative Officer; and Information Technology Technician Trainee.

Federally funded positions total 23.6 FTE, with 6 vacancies, and 6 vacancies currently in recruitment. The 7 vacancies are: Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Administrator (Starting March 12), Primary Prevention Services Coordinator (Preschool Development Grant (PDG), a Communications position (PDG), Education Projects Coordinator (Birth to Three, starting February 26), two Office Assistants (CCDF), and Associate Accountant (CCDF).

The Governor's budget transfers 1 position from the Department of Social Services to support fiscal and reporting functions for Care 4 Kids and CCDF.

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.