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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 Education Committee**
**H.B. 5465 – An Act Increasing Early Childhood Educator Salaries and
 Expanding Child Care Opportunities for Families**
S.B. 1 – An Act Concerning Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in Schools
March 21, 2022

Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Beth Bye. I am Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am here today to testify concerning **H.B. 5465 – An Act Increasing Early Childhood Educator Salaries and Expanding Child Care Opportunities for Families, and S.B. 1 – An Act Concerning Childhood Mental and Physical Health Services in Schools.**

Both H.B. 5465 and S.B. 1 lay out laudable goals for Connecticut’s child care industry. Some of these goals, not all, would require significant state funding. These two bills include wage increases for all child care providers – centers, group family child care homes, and family child care homes. Both increase the school readiness and child day care rate, each bill at different amounts. This funding is not reflected in the Governor’s budget.

H.B. 5465 allows school readiness councils to convert preschool spaces to infant and toddler spaces, when identified by a community needs assessment. Likewise, S.B. 1 requires the OEC Commissioner to increase or adjust the number of school readiness infant and toddler and preschool spaces, based on a community needs assessment. These bill provisions attempt to address a shortage of 50,000 infant toddler spaces across the state. OEC supports this change.

H.B. 5465 addresses the Care 4 Kids program, including income eligibility, market rate payment, parent fees, and a 90-day job search. The bill also establishes a higher education loan forgiveness program for early childhood educators. Funding for these changes is not in the Governor’s budget.

Family child care providers are allowed to care for up to 9 children year-round when an assistant is present, a policy change supported by the OEC. This does not have budget impact but would help many providers to have a more sustainable business and help with the infant toddler care shortage.

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Like every other state in the nation, the child care field has experienced significant challenges, fiscal stress, and exhaustion over the past two years due to COVID-19. Child care providers kept their doors open and served as front-line essential workers during the pandemic. They have struggled with severe workforce shortages, lower enrollment, closed classrooms, and higher costs for health and safety supplies.

The OEC responded by swiftly distributing federal ARPA child care stabilization funds, increasing Care 4 Kids by \$100 million for expansion of income eligibility and eligible activities, providing PPE supplies, paying for background check and accreditation fees, covering parent fees, and continues to offer other forms of relief.

The magnitude of the child care situation nationally, and here in Connecticut, that has been exacerbated and highlighted by the pandemic needs a federal response. The challenges highlighted during the pandemic were layered upon decades of an industry plagued by a broken market model where parents cannot afford to pay the full cost of care, and workers are not paid enough.

The federal Build Back Better legislation provided a vision and funding to bring transformative change to child care in this country. As you know Build Back Better did not pass, but efforts in Washington to pass child care legislation continues. This bill addresses some of those items that Build Back Better would have if it had passed.

Connecticut was slated to receive \$701,226,654 in federal funds over three years under the last version of Build Back Better. It designed the funding to increase each year to meet the needs and give time for system building over a five-year period. This funding was projected to support Connecticut getting to universal child care, where families would pay no more than 7 percent of their income on child care.

Governor Lamont, the legislature, and our federal delegation will continue seeking long-term systems building strategies that will stabilize and support the child care industry to ensure child care is affordable and accessible for Connecticut's children and families.

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.