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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



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

H.B. 5279 – An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood March 4, 2022

Greetings, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am here today to testify in support of the agency's bill, H.B. 5279 - An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Office of Early Childhood.

Section 1 of the bill adds the following individuals to the Early Childhood Cabinet: a licensed family child care provider who is a member of a staff family child network, and a parent who is a member of the OEC Parent Cabinet to the Early Childhood Cabinet.

Family Child Care (FCC) providers are a critical element of the early care and education system, and their importance has been heightened during the pandemic as their small group sizes make it easier to follow public health guidelines and allow many parents to feel more comfortable sending their children to this setting. Beyond the temporary COVID-19 implications, family child care providers also provide more flexible hours and offer culturally competent care, both of which are of critical importance to many families of color who are disproportionately likely to work non-traditional hours. They also provide an opportunity to rapidly address the lack of supply of high-quality infant and toddler care in the state. Their voice should be represented on the Early Childhood Cabinet.

Elevating the voice of families in building an equitable and accessible early care and education system is critical and essential. We have established an OEC Parent Cabinet, comprised of 15 parent members representing the regions of the state. The Parent Cabinet seeks to help make improvements to the lives of children and families by working directly with our state agency. The voice of the OEC Parent Cabinet, through one designated member, can help inform the Early Childhood Cabinet.

Section 1 also allows parents who are members of the OEC Parent Cabinet to receive compensation for time attending Early Childhood Cabinet meetings. Parents serving on the Cabinet are offering their time and expertise, not in a paid work capacity, and therefore, should be compensated for that time. This proposal allows, not requires, that parents be compensated.

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Section 1 also removes a penalty for non-attendance at meetings. Attendance at meetings can sometimes be out of a person's control, such as losing access to child care, requirements to stay on the job during scheduled meetings, illness, etc. This language that requires an individual to resign is too prescriptive and does not consider personal circumstances.

Section 2 of the bill allows the OEC Commissioner to adjust standards as needed to ensure sufficient workforce and staffing in School Readiness programs including the Qualified Staff Member (QSM) requirement. Allowing the OEC Commissioner to modify the QSM requirements considers hiring challenges in the early care and education field that may arise from adverse workforce conditions and other circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on child care centers' ability to recruit and retain qualified staff, resulting in classroom closures and sometimes, program closures. This has resulted in fewer child care spaces available for working families, creating challenges and even causing a parent to leave the workforce to care for their children. This statutory change will help with recruitment and retention of early care and education staff, particularly in difficult circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section 3 of the bill removes advertising as a youth camp from the definition of a youth camp. This is a technical change.

Section 4 would make a technical statutory change to Sec. 17b-749k due to the transition to the new criminal background system at DESPP. The OEC can no longer use the Connecticut On-Line Law Enforcement Communication Teleprocessing System (COLLECT) and is now using CT Criminal History Records System (CCHRS).

Section 5 also is a technical statutory change that removes reference to the date of validity of the early childhood teacher credential.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer your questions now and/or at a later date. The OEC is committed to work together—with legislators, the executive branch, providers, advocates and parents—to better serve our families with young children

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.