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OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



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Testimony of Beth Bye, Commissioner
Office of Early Childhood
Before the Education Committee
H.B. 5436 – An Act Concerning Teacher Certification
March 13, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, 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 concerning H.B. 5436 – An Act Concerning Teacher Certification.

The earliest years of a child's life shape who that child will grow up to be, affecting their future health, education, and success. The Office of Early Childhood focuses on children from birth to age 5. Helping young children learn, develop, and overcome barriers will have benefits that last a lifetime. A key part of our work is supporting the providers, teachers, and other professionals who have dedicated their careers to caring for and educating children.

Governor Lamont established the Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care 11 months ago and charged panel members with crafting a five-year plan to build an equitable, high-quality, and sustainable early childhood system that ensures that every child has a sound educational foundation that will prepare them to grow, learn, and succeed. The plan provides a vision for Connecticut's child care infrastructure that will improve access to quality care for thousands of families through efforts aimed at affordability and stabilizing and expanding child care businesses and improving the quality of programs.

The Office of Early Childhood participated in the Teacher Certification workgroup over the past several months. As the workgroup looked to move to fewer bands of certification to reduce the complexities for the teaching workforce across all grades, the PreK-3 band was an area where progress could be made. This change will require ongoing discussions and collaborations to implement successfully.

The preschool and kindergarten certification has changed multiple times over the past 10 years. In this time of transition, the State Department of Education (SDE) has been granting waivers to districts due to workforce shortages. This has put many teachers with no early childhood

education training into preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Extending the elementary endorsement to include both kindergarten and PreK will help to ensure that our elementary programs will align with early childhood standards and address teacher shortages in early elementary settings.

Additionally, adding PreK and Kindergarten to the elementary certification will require institutions of higher education to add coursework in early childhood education for elementary teachers, as well as student teaching opportunities in preschool and kindergarten settings. OEC believes that adding higher education coursework in early childhood education will bring some of the strengths of these approaches to new elementary educators and can help embed child development knowledge into early childhood instruction.

OEC believes that this change should come with protections to assure that higher education institutions are ready to meet early childhood higher education standards for their PreK-6 certification programs. It would be beneficial to hear feedback from Connecticut's higher education programs and national higher education standards organizations. If the Education Committee required NAEYC Accreditation for higher education institutions offering PreK-6 certification before implementation of this change, that would go a long way to assure teachers are prepared for their roles.

OEC has been working with four of the five Connecticut institutions that offer the PreK-3 certifications, engaging in early childhood higher education accreditation efforts. OEC has been funding this work in the Connecticut State Colleges and University (CSCU) system. To add in the institutions that offer the elementary certification, but not currently ECE, would mean eight institutions would need to start the process while the four institutions need to add the elementary program to their application to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This effort would align with Blue Ribbon Panel efforts and go a long way in aligning with the early childhood Unifying Framework as an indicator of quality and accountability for teaching young children.

OEC is ready to work with the efforts of this joint committee, SDE, and Higher Education to move toward this change. We understand that the current teacher certification system needs significant reform, and OEC is ready to be part of that change to benefit all students. Serving on the certification committee was a real eye opener to the challenges for districts and need for change and soon. Our area of concern is our youngest learners and improving the preparation of the professionals teaching them. If the reform is done right, it will do just that.