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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
S.B. 5 – An Act Concerning School Resources
March 11, 2024

Good morning, 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 Section 7 of S.B. 5 – An Act Concerning School Resources.

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.

We appreciate the intent of Section 7 of Senate Bill 5 to ensure children enrolled in the Baby Bond Trust Fund are also eligible for the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy program. Section 7 proposes to add to the list of eligible participants in the Care 4 Kids program to include the parent or guardian of a designated beneficiary under the Connecticut Baby Bond Trust. Section 7 also proposes to waive the Care 4 Kids income standards for the parents or guardians of the designated Baby Bond Trust beneficiary.

Federal rules may preclude us from opening eligibility without families completing the required application currently required for federal subsidy funds. We are researching with the federal agency considering this new concept.

Phone: (860) 500-4412 · Fax: (860) 326-0554
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 301
Hartford, Connecticut 06103
www.ct.gov/oec
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This program change would significantly expand the Care 4 Kids wait list. Currently, there are approximately 18,300 children (13,100 families) enrolled in the program on average, per month. The Governor’s proposed budget adds \$12.9 million to increase eligibility from 60 to 65 percent of the state median income and increase enrollment to 20,150 children.

The average number of enrolled infants and toddlers who are also enrolled in Medicaid totaled 4,300 based on data from July – December 2023. About 16,000 babies born each year are enrolled in Medicaid. The average Care 4 Kids infant/toddler cost per month is \$1,200 with an annual cost of \$14,400.

Age	Average # Children on C4K + Medicaid	Average # of Families on C4K + Medicaid
Infant Toddler	4,300	3,000
PreK	3,600	2,500
School Age	3,500	2,500
All Age Groups	11,400	8,000

About 1,130 Care 4 Kids applications are pending (prior to going on the waitlist) and 744 applicants are on the waitlist. This bill would add significantly more babies into the application and enrollment system. With a wait list in effect, it would expand the number of families waiting to enroll their child in the program. A longer wait list may deny care to parents who are working and need child care to remain in their job.

We appreciate the laudable goal of this proposal, but due to these concerns we cannot support this section of the bill at this time. We will continue to communicate with our federal oversight agency and evaluate the allowability of this change in eligibility determination. We will update this committee as we learn more.

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.