

**Testimony of Jamey Bell
before the Human Services Committee**

IN SUPPORT OF

***HB 5841 AN ACT CONCERNING A UNIFORM REPORTING FORM FOR
PRESCHOOL AND CHILD CARE PROGRAMS.***

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***HB 5426 AN ACT CONCERNING CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES FOR THE UNEMPLOYED
UNDER THE CARE 4 KIDS PROGRAM***

February 5, 2009

Thank you, Representative Walker and Senator Doyle, and members of the Human Services Committee, for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of two bills before you which affect the state's early care and education systems. I am the Executive Director of CT Voices for Children, whose mission is to promote the well-being of all of Connecticut's young people and their families by advocating for strategic public investments and wise public policies.

I. IN SUPPORT OF HB 5841:

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports development of a uniform reporting form for all preschool and child care programs receiving state funding. As advocates for public investments that *make sense*, we particularly stress the need for this innovation as a crucial monitoring and oversight tool. Under the current reporting system it is impossible to calculate the number of children the state is serving through their early care programming as multiple funding streams are subsidizing the care of one child. For example, a three-year-old may receive a childcare subsidy via Care4Kids and simultaneously be awarded a preschool slot in a state-funded center or School Readiness program. Data collection between programs is not coordinated, so "double counting" results. While we can, and do, look at the number of children currently being served by individual state programs, and how that number has changed over time, our inability to estimate the total number of children served makes it difficult to offer an accurate assessment of Connecticut's progress in serving all children in need.

The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Work Group expressed in their recommendations to both the Early Childhood Education Cabinet and the Governor's Early

Childhood Research and Policy Council that in order for QRIS to be successfully implemented a structure needs to be created for early care and education. Uniform funding and reporting requirements were specifically recommended as the linchpin of a new, successful organization structure. The keys to supporting and educating the greatest number of Connecticut's children in the highest quality settings are organization and standardization.

You will hear from the provider community—those who know this best-- that multiple reporting requirements are redundant, time consuming and inefficient. Streamlining and making uniform reporting requirements will allow programs to file necessary reports and information without duplication, thereby improving administrative function and increasing staff time available for children. This change will relieve the burden of many childcare center directors who spend hours every month reviewing numbers on attendance, services, and staff – many times for the same child who receives support from different programs. In a time of service cutbacks and reduced funding it is imperative that all effort should be used to make sure that dollars are being used directly to support children as opposed to being misspent on duplicative and uninformative administrative costs.

II. IN SUPPORT OF HB 5426:

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports amending the general statutes to require DSS to grant a parent who becomes unemployed eligibility for a childcare subsidy under Care4Kids that is consistent with the period of unemployment benefits eligibility (26 weeks). Availability of extended childcare benefits is especially important at a time of unemployment because the child care setting can provide a stable environment for the child during a time of certain economic and other stress for the family.

Equally important is that extending childcare benefits allows *the child* to continue receiving quality early care and education, preparing the child for future educational success, and productivity as an adult worker.

From a long-term systemic and structural view, as more and more parents lose their jobs in the current state and national employment downturn, the financial stability of early care providers may be jeopardized, placing the whole system at risk. Care4Kids is one of just three funding streams that providers in centers serving low-income kids rely on, the other two being school readiness and DSS funding. A drop off in any one of these funding streams would create a fiscal nightmare that could jeopardize entire programs.

It is our understanding that the proposed federal stimulus package includes dollars for the Child Development Block Grant that could be applied to this extension. If the current version of the Recovery Act is passed there will be approximately 2.1 billion dollars made available to the states in additional Child Care and Development Block Grant funding.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today.