Testimony Regarding
S.B. 300: An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education
and
H.B. 5350: An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy by Grade Three

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Education Committee
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Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

We support S.B. 300, *An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education*, which would phase in universal access to preschool through the School Readiness program over the next five years.

There is great unmet need for access to affordable, quality early care programs, which the proposed bill would address. Approximately 10,000 three- and four-year-olds in struggling families currently do not receive any state subsidy to assist with early care and education.[1] We laud this bill's recognition that this need exists across all of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns, not just in the 19 Priority and 45 Competitive School Districts that are currently able to access School Readiness funding.

Research shows that high quality early care programs help close the preparation gap for low-income children,[2] and are a critical part of closing the racial and economic achievement gaps in Connecticut. Expanding access to preschool through School Readiness will help ensure that more children receive this type of quality care, as programs which receive School Readiness funding are required to be accredited and their teachers must meet stringent credentialing requirements.[3]

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[1] We define struggling families as families with incomes at or below 75% of the state median income (SMI), which is the highest level of Care4Kids eligibility in recent years. *See* Sarah Esty and Cyd Oppenheimer, "Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2011" *Connecticut Voices for Children* (December 2011), pg 6, available at: http://ctkidslink.org/publications/ecereportcard2011.pdf

[2] A study of Oklahoma's high-quality preschool program found that children eligible for free lunch saw the greatest gains from preschool, followed by children eligible for reduced price lunch, then children not eligible for reduced-price lunch. Black and Hispanic children saw greater gains than their white peers. *See,* William Gormley and Deborah Phillips, "The Effects of Universal Pre-K in Oklahoma: Research Highlights and Policy Implications," *Center for Research on Children in the United States, Georgetown University* (October 2003), available at: http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/EffectsofUPKinOK.pdf

[3] *See,* PA 11-54, "An Act Concerning Requirements for Early Childhood Educators," *Connecticut General Statutes* (2011) (available at: http://cga.ct.gov/2011/ACT/PA/2011PA-00054-R00SB-00927-PA.htm), which requires that by 2015 50% of head teachers in programs accepting School Readiness funds hold a bachelor's degree with a focus on early childhood education and by 2020 100% of such teachers must hold a bachelor's degree with a focus on early childhood education.

The School Readiness program was established in 1997 to address concerns about segregation in access to early education. **We hope that attention will be paid in the implementation of this bill to ensure that economic and racial integration remains an important feature of the School Readiness program as it expands throughout the state.**

We support the goals of H.B. 5350, *An Act Concerning Achieving Universal Literacy by Grade Three*, which seeks to promote early literacy for all children. **We strongly support this bill's inclusion of research-based literacy training for teachers working with children birth to five. We would further recommend amending Section 1 of the bill to include preschool** in the proposed curricular alignment (subsections 1 and 12), and year-end transition planning for students and tracking of student performance data from year-to-year (3), all of which are currently targeted only at children in kindergarten through grade three.

Research shows that high quality early care programs help close the preparation gap for low-income children,[4] and are a critical part of closing the racial and economic achievement gaps in Connecticut. Furthermore, alignment between preschool and K-3 education helps prevent against "fade-out," helping young children maintain the gains from preschool into later grades.[5]

We laud the inclusion of parental engagement provisions in this bill, as parents are children's first and most important teachers,[6] particularly for the youngest children, and we hope that this committee will consider **expanding these provisions (Section 1 (6) and (8)) to include preschool age children as well.**

We would encourage this committee to include language ensuring that assessments of children and curricular changes be developmentally appropriate, particularly for younger children. Extensive research finds cognitive, physical, social, and emotional benefits to child-driven play-based activities for young children, including those in preschool and kindergarten.[7] Assessments that include physical, social, and emotional metrics in addition to academic measures will help ensure that activities targeted towards development of the full range of areas remain a priority.

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[4] A study of Oklahoma's high-quality preschool program found that children eligible for free lunch saw the greatest gains from preschool, followed by children eligible for reduced price lunch, then children not eligible for reduced-price lunch. Black and Hispanic children saw greater gains than their white peers. *See,* William Gormley and Deborah Phillips, "The Effects of Universal Pre-K in Oklahoma: Research Highlights and Policy Implications," *Center for Research on Children in the United States, Georgetown University* (October 2003), available at: http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/EffectsofUPKinOK.pdf

[5] *See, for example,* Rima Shore, "The Case for Investing in Pre-K Education," *Foundation for Child Development* (January 2009), available at: http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/TheCaseForInvesting-ChallengingMyths.pdf.

[6] *See, for example,* Douglas Powell, "Parents as the Child's First Teacher: Opportunities and Constraints," *US Department of Education*, (October 1990), available at: http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED325231.pdf

[7] *See, for example*, Kenneth Ginsburg, "The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds," *The American Academy of Pediatrics*, (January 2007), available at: http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/119/1/182.full