

Testimony Regarding the Governor's Proposed Budget for Early Care and Education

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Committee on Appropriations

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am a Policy Fellow at 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.

Connecticut Voices for Children applauds the Governor's budget proposal to maintain funding for School Readiness,¹ the state's largest subsidized preschool program, and Care4Kids, the state's largest child care subsidy program.² Though the maintenance of funding for School Readiness and Care4Kids are important indicators of the state's continued commitment to its youngest citizens, we express concern that the Governor's budget proposal does not demonstrate an equally robust commitment to ensuring that all early care and education (ECE) settings are of the highest quality and can address the comprehensive needs of children and their families. **Thus we ask the legislature to reverse the proposed funding cuts and elimination of programs that recognize the need for a high-quality, two generation approach to early education.**

We also support the Governor's proposal to offer full-day kindergarten to every child in Connecticut by fall 2017.³ However, expanded access to full-day kindergarten should be coupled with a commitment to support children beyond the first five years. **Thus we ask that you oppose the Governor's proposed cuts or eliminations to programs that support children as they grow and move through all stages of development.**

1. Support the Governor's Proposal to Maintain Funding for School Readiness and Care4Kids

We urge you to stand with the Governor in sustaining funding for School Readiness.

Prekindergarten education is a crucial investment in our children's future and our state's future. Studies show that every dollar invested in high-quality early care and education can yield returns of up to seven dollars in savings through reduction of remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services.⁴ Preschool programs for disadvantaged students have been shown to be particularly effective, generating annual return on investments of 16% or higher.⁵ In 2013-2014, School Readiness funded subsidized preschool for 10,164 children in Priority School Districts, and 1,144 children in Competitive School Districts.⁶

We also urge you to stand with the Governor in maintaining funding for Care4Kids. Access to language-rich, nurturing, and responsive caregiving is shown to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. However, childcare continues to be unaffordable for many Connecticut families, with the average cost of center care for a preschooler reaching almost \$11,000 per year.⁷ By subsidizing child care costs for low- to moderate-income families, Care4Kids allows many of these families to obtain safe and affordable child care for their children that would otherwise be unavailable to them. The Care4Kids program supports child care for about 6,986 infants and toddlers and 6,888 preschoolers

a month in low-income families, allowing their parents to work or receive job training, and providing a safe, nurturing environment for young children.⁸

2. Roll Back the Proposed Reductions and Elimination of Programs that Promote High-Quality, Comprehensive ECE

We oppose the provisions of the Governor's budget that propose significant cuts or elimination of programs targeted at improving the quality of our state's early education network. Studies show that the multiple long-term benefits reaped by early care and education are only realized if programs are of high-quality.⁹ The Governor's budget proposal decreases funding for School Readiness Quality Enhancement by 5% (\$0.26 million), reduces funding for quality improvements to Head Start by \$0.1 million,¹⁰ and eliminates funding for Improving Early Literacy (\$0.15 million). Without access to high-quality programs, Connecticut's children will lack the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional benefits that last well beyond the earliest years.¹¹

We also ask that you maintain funding for programs that recognize the need for a two-generation, holistic approach to early education. In particular, the Governor's proposed budget reduces funding for Even Start by 5% (\$0.24 million) and eliminates funding for Wraparound Services (\$0.45 million) and Parent Universities (\$0.49). These programs take into account the fact that children do well when families do well, and help implement crucial educational supports to increase opportunity for low-income parents of young children.

In addition to these important programs, the proposed budget also eliminates the Community Plans for Early Childhood grant (\$0.75 million), for which the Graustein Memorial Fund provides matching funds. These funds enable early childhood collaboratives to support the well-being of young children at a local level. These collaboratives bring together parents, providers, and policymakers; strive to identify obstacles to healthy child development within their own communities; and then implement strategies to eliminate these obstacles, through better planning, greater opportunity, and improved access. **We need state funding in order to be able to leverage the philanthropic dollars on offer, which will allow these communities to build upon the important work they have been doing for more than a decade.**

3. Restore Funding for Programs that Support Children as They Grow

We ask that you continue to support programs that support children as they grow and move through all stages of development. The Governor's budget proposes eliminating programming for school-age children at state-funded child development centers in FY 16 and FY 17 (a reduction of \$0.8 million per year). Ensuring affordable, accessible, high-quality before- and after-school care is another two-generation strategy that benefits children and their parents, one the state must support.

The Governor's budget proposal also eliminates funding (\$0.8 million) for Bridgeport's ABCD Total Learning Initiative,¹² a program specifically designed to ensure that gains made by children in Head Start are maintained when they enter the K-12 system, by providing smaller classes, extended school day, professional development for teachers, family support, and parent outreach.¹³ This comprehensive approach should be embraced and expanded, not eliminated.

Finally, we ask the legislature to oppose the Governor's budget proposal that reduces funding for the Children's Trust Fund, which represents the elimination of funding for Help Me Grow, Family School Connection, and Family Empowerment Programs. The Help Me Grow program provides access for Connecticut families to a coordinated, statewide system of early detection for children at-risk for adverse developmental and behavioral outcomes, as well as care coordination for these children and families.¹⁴ Help Me Grow, along with the other programs eliminated in the Children's Trust Fund, are designed to educate and empower parents to monitor their children's educational and health development. We should not cut crucial programs that enable Connecticut to be a national leader in early childhood systems building.

While we understand the need for fiscal responsibility, we believe that it is critical to make investments in children and working families, and that such investments reap incredible rewards for the state in the long run in terms of healthier, more successful children, improved academic outcomes, increased economic growth, and a better prepared future workforce. We therefore respectfully request that you reinstate funding for the aforementioned programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

¹ The proposed appropriation for School Readiness in Priority School Districts in FY 16 is \$3.4 million more than FY 15, not because there will be any new pre-school slots in these districts, but because FY 15 funding budgeted only 9 months of funding for the additional 1,020 slots created that year (September – June). The \$3.4 million budgeted in FY 16 will pay for an additional three months of funding for these existing slots so that they are funded for a full fiscal year (July-June). Additionally, \$0.63 million of the increase in funding for Priority School Districts comes from a re-allocation away from School Readiness Funding for Competitive School Districts due to unfilled slots in those districts.

² Though there appears to be an increase of \$9.1 million from the FY15 Final Budget to the FY16 Governor Proposed budget in the Care4Kids line item, this increase actually represents a reallocation from “Other” services for the Office of Early Childhood’s contract with United Way to administer the Care4Kids program (\$8.3 million), and a contract-mandated increase in rates for family child care and kith and kin providers (\$2.1 million). (The proposal does not contain any increase in rates for child care centers.) The proposal also moves \$1.3 million from the Care4Kids line item into a new line item: Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (thus the apparent net increase of \$9.1: $8.3 + 2.1 - 1.3 = 9.1$). The proposal does not contain any additional funding for program expansion.

³ See, Iverson, Sarah and Oppenheimer, Cyd, “Testimony in Support of S.B. 944: An Act Establishing a Full-Day Kindergarten Requirement,” (February 25, 2015), available at http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/022515_edu_sb944_fulldaykindergarten.pdf.

⁴ Reynolds, A.J., Ou, Suh-Ruu, and Topitzes, James, “Paths of Effects of Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Attainment and Delinquency: A Confirmatory Analysis of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers,” (September 2004), available at: <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/icd/research/CLS/docs/pathway.pdf>.

⁵ Heckman, James and Masterov, Dimitriy “The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children,” (January 2007), available at http://jenni.uchicago.edu/human-inequality/papers/Heckman_final_all_wp_2007-03-22c_jsb.pdf.

⁶ School Readiness enrollment numbers provided by Alissa Marotta, State Department of Education, via e-mail, on September 27, 2014. Numbers represent utilization in June 2014.

⁷ 211 Child Care, “Fee Analysis of Child Care Facilities in Connecticut: July 16, 2013, available at <http://www.211childcare.org/reports/average-child-care-cost/>.

⁸ The latest enrollment figures, from December 2014, show 6,986 infants and toddlers and 6,888 preschoolers receiving Care4Kids subsidies. See, “Number of Children Paid by Age Category and Service Setting,” Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (December 2014), available at: <http://www.ctcare4kids.com/files/2012/07/December-2014.pdf>.

⁹ Espinosa, Linda M., “High-Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What it Looks Like,” National Institute for Early Education Research (November 2002), available at <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/1.pdf>.

¹⁰ Because Head Start appropriations, which were previously separated into three line items (Head Start Services, Head Start Enhancement, and Head Start - Early Childhood link), have been consolidated into one, it is not possible to identify where the \$0.1 million reduction will be targeted. However, since Head Start - Early Childhood Link (which provides quality enhancement funds to Head Start programs) received a \$0.1 million cut in the November rescissions (see Governor’s Allotment Reductions Effective 11/20/2014 p.4, http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2016_2017_biennial_budget/rescissions_-_20nov2014.pdf), it is our assumption that the current budget proposal maintains Head Start-Early Childhood Link funding at post-rescission FY 2015 levels.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Governor’s Budget Summary FY 2016- FY 2017, Section A: Financial Summary, Summary of General Fund Revenue Recommendations, A-5,

http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2016_2017_biennial_budget/budget/section_a.pdf.

¹³ “About the Total Learning Initiative,” http://www.abcd.org/total_learning/about-program.html.

¹⁴ United Way of Connecticut, "Help Me Grow," (February 2015).