



Testimony Regarding S.B. 365: An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education Funding

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Appropriations Committee
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Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Nicole Updegrove, and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. **We support the intentions of S.B. 165 and we ask that the Committee consider three additional points: (1) specifically highlighting the importance of Care 4 Kids, (2) including wrap-around services within this bill's charge, and (3) designating the Office of Early Childhood as the lead agency for this study.**

Early childhood programs are crucial to our state's future, helping to bolster both the success of our young children and the strength of our current workforce. Early care and education (or ECE, the term used to describe infant/toddler care and preschool) is the most visible component of our early childhood system. **Each year, Connecticut's high-quality early care and preschool programs provide an estimated \$2.3 billion in long-term benefits to the state economy.**¹ These benefits include increased employment for parents, increased future earnings for children, and decreased need for social services. If every child in the state who is in need of child care could attend a high-quality program, we estimate that Connecticut would benefit from an additional \$11.1 billion per year in long-term returns.² However, early childhood programs consist of much more than early care and education.

1. Care 4 Kids plays a critical role in making early care and education accessible and equitable.

Care 4 Kids provides subsidies to low-income working families to help them access high-quality child care. While Care 4 Kids is one funding stream that may fall under the purview of this bill, the program is worth specifically highlighting. Families in 98 percent of Connecticut towns rely on Care 4 Kids subsidies; in half of those towns, Care 4 Kids provides the only available form of state support for early care and education.³ Unfortunately, our fiscal analysis shows that the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy often faces funding cuts during state budget deficits while state-funded ECE classrooms and slots are held harmless.⁴ **Supporting Care 4 Kids is critical to helping Connecticut families' access high-quality early care and education and to strengthening our state's economy.**

2. Wrap-around services are a critical and often overlooked aspect of Connecticut's early childhood system.

We urge this committee to ensure that any bill regarding funding for early childhood programs includes funding for our critical wrap-around supports. Early care and education programs typically provide care and support for children in classrooms or family child care homes for six or eight hours per day.

However, as any parent knows, caring for a young child is an around-the-clock job, especially for families dealing with challenges such as homelessness, poverty, or caring for a child who has disabilities or developmental delays.

High-quality child care programs consist of two primary components: excellent classroom instruction and robust “wrap-around supports.”⁵ Connecticut’s early childhood system includes a variety of these wrap-around supports, including behavioral health supports, home visiting, and parent training programs, which help meet the needs of the child and family both in and outside of the classroom. **Wrap-around supports constitute a crucial component of high-quality child care programs and our early childhood system.**⁶ A cut to our wrap-around supports therefore threatens the efficacy of our core ECE programming; unfortunately, many state-funded wrap-around supports have been cut or eliminated in recent years.⁷

3. The Office of Early Childhood must maintain its central role in serving young children.

As written, this bill tasks the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Early Childhood, with reviewing early childhood education funding mechanisms. Although the State Department of Education (SDE) does administer some of the state’s preschool programs, the OEC has the greatest ability to lead the state’s early childhood efforts:

- A national study shows that early childhood services are most effectively delivered through a unified early childhood agency.⁸ In part in response to this research, the legislature codified the OEC in 2014 with the mission “to support all young children in their development by ensuring that early childhood policy, funding and services strengthen the critical role families, providers, educators and communities play in a child’s life.”⁹
- The OEC serves all children from birth to five, whereas SDE only serves children beginning in preschool (age three or four). Assigning this study to SDE may lead to further prioritization of preschool over the needs of infants and toddlers.
- The OEC administers and regulates state-funded wrap-around supports, quality improvement efforts, and other early childhood initiatives.

We urge the legislature to prioritize the needs of Connecticut’s children and families by empowering the OEC to continue investing in early childhood education, child care subsidies, and wrap-around supports. These are smart policies for working families with young children and for the state of Connecticut as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding S.B. 365. I can be reached with any questions at nupdegrove@ctvoices.org or at 203-498-4240, ext. 107.

¹ Noonan, R, Updegrove, N, and Long D. (2017). “The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Care.” Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/ECE-Impact>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Long, D and Updegrove N. (2017). “Care 4 Kids in Connecticut: Impact of Program Closure on Children, Parents, and Providers.” Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/sites/default/files/Care%204%20Kids%20Brief%20-%20TFinal.pdf>.

⁴ See discussion in Updegrave, N, Long, D, and Ruth L. (2017). “The Changing State of Early Childhood 2016 – 2017.” Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/changing-state-early-childhood-2016-2017>. pp. 13-14.

⁵ Updegrave, N, Noonan, R, and Long D. (2017). “Assessing Quality in Connecticut’s Early Childhood System.” Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctvoices.org/ECE-Quality>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Coffman, J, et al. BUILD Initiative. (2010). “Early Childhood System Governance: Lessons from State Experiences.”

⁹ Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. (Modified 2017). “About Us: Our Mission.” Retrieved from: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?a=4546&q=535738>