



Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc.

February 14, 2013

TESTIMONY REGARDING RAISED BILL HB 6359 AN ACT CONCERNING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Submitted to: The Education Committee

By: Judith Meyers, Ph.D. – President and CEO, Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI) and the Children's Fund of Connecticut

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and other members of the Education Committee, I am President of the Children's Fund of Connecticut and its subsidiary, the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI). Our mission is to promote primary and preventive health and mental health care for all children in Connecticut, with a particular focus on the underserved. Our Board Members include key state leaders in health care and members of the academic, education and business community who are committed to improving developmental outcomes for children in Connecticut.

Based on a Framework for Child Health, a report prepared by Paul Dworkin, Lisa Honigfeld and myself, one key focus of our work is to promote a fully integrated system for young children that coordinates early care and education with a comprehensive healthcare network to ensure optimal healthy child development and readiness for school success. We couldn't be more pleased to see that this proposed new agency is called the Office of Early Childhood, connoting the recognition of the importance of the full range of developmental needs (physical, cognitive, social, emotional) beginning at birth that are essential to a child's ability to learn.

As a contributing member of the early childhood funders collaborative, a member of the prior Early Care and Education Cabinet, and in my position at CHDI and the Children's Fund, The Governor's proposed creation of the Office of Early Childhood, as outlined in this legislation, is the culmination of years of work. It is a courageous and far reaching proposal that creates one place for the coordination and delivery of many of early childhood services that are currently scattered across five state agencies. By coordinating in one agency, the state will be able to reduce the fragmentation and thereby simplify the process of insuring that all programs and services are of the highest quality and families have information and access to these services. We will have a more holistic vision of what the needs and gaps in services are and be better positioned to make smart and cost-effective policy decisions. Currently, with programs in several different agencies, early childhood is not getting the focus needed to achieve the maximum return on investment.

The Children's Fund is a member of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative that includes over 12 state and local foundations in Connecticut. Together we have raised over \$150,000 towards the development of the plan that is reflected in this legislation and we plan to continue this public/private partnership to support the transition to this new way of working under one office.

I urge passage of this bill and remain committed to bringing our resources and expertise to help ensure the Office of Early Childhood will prove its value in improving services and supports for children from birth to five in Connecticut.

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