



Connecticut Association for Human Services
110 Bartholomew Avenue · Suite 4030
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cahs.org

Casey McGuane, President
James P. Horan, Executive Director
860.951.2212
860.951.6511 fax

TESTIMONY REGARDING:

- **H.B. 7020, AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND INITIATIVES**
- **S.B. 1099, CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMISSION TO DEVELOP A VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE CONNECTICUT EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Good Afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee. I am Elizabeth Fraser, Policy Analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide, nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy work at the Capitol and program work in low-income communities statewide.

I am here to comment on H.B 7020, an act concerning early childhood educators, and S.B.1099, concerning a strategic plan for the state's education system. Both bills seek to improve service delivery in early care and education in Connecticut, and include significant improvements to our current system. We believe, however, that the Committee can incorporate some changes to make them even stronger.

H.B. 7020 - AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND INITIATIVES

The creation of the Office of Early Childhood last year by the General Assembly was a very important first step towards creating a coordinated and comprehensive framework for early care and education. This step has led to some significant service delivery improvements. H.B. 7020 continues moving the state towards a more coordinated, effective system, with many welcome changes.

a. Kindergarten Inventory

One of the most important gaps in the current early care and education system is the lack of an effective, well-designed tool to assess school readiness. The Office of Early Childhood is currently working with a consortium of seven other states in developing an appropriate assessment tool that could gage a child's level of preparedness for kindergarten. H.B 7020 includes additional language that would mandate the Department of Education to administer these assessments, as the agency responsible for kindergarten in the state.

Section 3 includes provisions for tracking and reporting analyzed data back to local communities, including the Kindergarten “assessment.” We suggest that this information also be communicated back to the Office of Early Childhood, with the intent of informing trends, strengths and gaps in the early care system. (Trends only, not as a measurement tool for individual program accountability)

We believe that another important piece of information to include in this reporting is the information gathered by the preschool experience survey as described in 10-515. This survey will provide valuable information about unmet preschool need in communities. Although we know there is unmet need, we don’t have a clear and uniform picture as to how many, where and why children are not attending.

Unfortunately the current language 10-15 states the preschool experience survey **may** be included in kindergarten registration, we suggest changing it to **shall** be included in kindergarten registration. This way there will be consistent information gathered from across the state and there will be clear data available for the SDE to analyze track and report on. Again this information needs to be shared with the OEC to inform the early care community on potential need.

School readiness is one of the key objectives of Connecticut’s pre-K programs, and the data derived from the kindergarten inventory and the information gathered by the Preschool Experience Survey should be used to inform the design of the state’s early care and education system. This would further the work of the past few year building a more unified, streamlined, coordinated system in the state.

b. Workforce Trend Analysis

Section five of the proposed bill instructs the Office of Early Childhood to conduct a trend analysis of the early childhood bachelor’s degree programs for the purpose of determining which programs align with the NAEYC standards and are approved courses of study for the CT early care workforce. This information would be shared publically in the OEC website, allowing potential early care students to wisely choose their program and course of study.

We respectfully suggest that this should also include a workforce trend analysis. This analysis should include data on enrollment and graduation trends for approved bachelor’s programs in early childhood or childhood development, current staffing needs in centers, retirement projections and other pertinent information necessary to determine the state of the early care workforce. Current law requires that by 2020 all early care and education teachers in state funded programs will need to have attained an approved bachelor’s degree with a concentration in early care and education. We believe this is an important step towards

providing quality early care experiences to all children. However, as it stands, we don't know if we will be able to meet this goal. The collection of data that addresses our early care and education workforce pipeline would be valuable. The Office of Early Childhood should have the information available to monitor the state's ability to supply a qualified workforce, and plan accordingly depending on the results.

c. Magnet and Charter School Accreditation

Under current law, early care and education programs located in magnet or charter schools are not required to obtain accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The path to NAEYC accreditation requires that programs conduct an extensive self-study based on quality standards covering 10 domains relevant to early care and education. All other public and private programs that receive state funding are required to obtain accreditation as a way to ensure their quality. H.B. 7020 expands this requirement to charter and magnet schools. This would create a uniform set of rules to provide quality education for children across the state, providing a more unified and consistent system. We support this change.

d. Funding for Early Childhood Councils

Local early childhood councils are community centered, public-private partnerships designed to promote the health, education and well-being of the areas young children. These councils serve as both local forums to coordinate services, evaluate community needs and exchange best practices, but also as valuable forums to develop effective partnerships between community providers, state and local agencies. They are invaluable tools to create a coordinated, integrated system in many cities in towns, as they enable both horizontal and vertical strategies to cooperate and improve service delivery. In addition, their funding combines state resources with a 1:1 match from private foundations, further improving community engagement. This funding often leverages additional federal and local grants.

The governor's budget proposal eliminates funding for the early childhood councils, something that would be a significant loss for community providers across the state and make coordinating services more difficult. CAHS strongly supports the provisions in H.B. 7020 restoring funding and providing continued support to this valuable initiative.

e. Wages:

Finally H.B.7020 includes language instructing the Office of Early Childhood to develop a plan to assist early care and education providers to increase salaries and retain staff. We would like to stress the importance of increased wages for providers going forward. Since 1998, state-funding levels for early childhood slots has only been increased twice, going from

\$8,000 to approximately \$8,650. If funding had kept pace with inflation, however, that figure should be closer to \$11,600.

The stagnating funding levels translate into low wages for early care and education staff. This, combined to the increased educational requirements by 2020, could potentially bring a workforce crisis in Connecticut's early care system unless funding is increased to a point that providers can attract and retain staff.

S.B. 1099 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMISSION TO DEVELOP A VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE CONNECTICUT EDUCATION SYSTEM

CAHS supports the establishment of this commission; Connecticut needs a strategic plan for education to further develop a more coordinated system. S.B. 1099, however, omits one important stakeholder on its list of members, as it does not have any representation from the Office of Early Childhood. We believe that including a representative of the OEC as ex-officio member is needed to have a truly system-wide look at the state's education system.

CAHS believes that Connecticut needs a state government that is able to invest on its education infrastructure, building a coordinated system focused on the child. Both H.B. 7020 and S.B. 1099 contribute to that goal.

Thanks for your time today and I would be happy to answer questions.