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Testimony in support of S.B. 424: An Act Concerning Preschool Programs for Children in the Care and Custody of the Department of Children and Families

Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Members of the Committee,

I am Elizabeth Fraser, a policy analyst for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS is a statewide, non-profit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote family economic success through both policy and program work.

CAHS would like offer full support for S.B. 424, which would provide preschool for children who have been removed from their home to be placed in DCF care.

It is our belief that all three and four year old children should have access to high quality pre-school experiences. As Connecticut moves in this direction, we believe it is appropriate to give special consideration to some of Connecticut's most vulnerable children, those who by necessity or dire circumstance, have been removed from their home and placed in DCF care. This small cohort of children will not be returning to their former home. These children are permanently placed with family members or foster families. We believe it is only right to afford these children the experiences that a quality preschool experience would provide. One would think that intentional preschool placements already would be occurring for the majority of children in DCF care and custody. Yet, recent numbers suggest that of the 395 eligible preschool aged children, only 220 were actually enrolled in a program. This accounts for only about 56% of the eligible children. S.B. 424 would require that DCF provide preschool to all eligible children in its care.

When placing children in programs the lingering effects of trauma and loss should be considered. We offer several suggestions:

- DCF should seek placements that encourage consistency in environment. Children should be thoughtfully placed so that they are not moved from program to program depending on their living arrangements.
- DCF should partner with the preschool programs. Children's success should be a priority. Program staff may need guidance in working with children who have experienced trauma. It will be important for DCF to provide consultation, support and/or additional services to support program staff towards the success of children.

It is our position that *all* children in DCF custody and care, many of whom have lived through more difficulties and trauma than most of us could imagine, should have the opportunity to participate in preschool experiences that might contribute to feelings of security and belonging. It is unfortunate that up to this point a large percentage of children in DCF custody and care are not receiving the benefit of these experiences. Hopefully the passage of this bill will provide direction.