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Testimony in support of SB 25 and SB 26

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Good Afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee, my name is Elizabeth Fraser, I am a Policy Analyst with the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work. I am testifying today in support of SB 25: An Act Establishing the Office of Early Childhood and SB 26: An Act Expanding the Opportunities for Early Childhood Education.

SB 25: An Act Establishing an Office of Early Childhood

One of the most promising achievements from the 2013 Legislative Session was the work done toward creating the Office of Early Childhood. This initiative unifies a cadre of disconnected programs, across agencies, into a single, focused and accountable system. It is encouraging that the process of merging both programs and funding streams into the Office of Early Childhood is well underway. However, the accomplishments to date and future initiatives will not be secure until the Office is codified by statute.

CAHS fully supports SB 25. We believe that the system being developed provides a deliberate strategy that will be of benefit to programs, families and most importantly, to children. The future unified data collection and reporting system will provide direction and accountability toward results. CAHS would also like to express support for the inclusion of the grandfathering language within SB 25 that addresses teacher credentialing. This language allows for many proven educators, who have been of positive influence in the lives of children, to continue doing their important work. Without the inclusion of grandfathering language, a significant number of dedicated educators would not be able to continue in their role. This loss would be to the detriment of both programs and children.

With the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood, early childhood issues, protocol and best practice have been lifted into Connecticut's educational conversation. Now is the time to expeditiously vote the Office of Early Childhood into Connecticut statute, so that the positive changes that are in process are permanently established as part of Connecticut's educational system.

SB 26: An Act Expanding the Opportunities for Early Childhood Education.

CAHS supports the concept that all children should be afforded the right to high quality early learning experiences. With this in mind, we strongly support Governor Malloy's vision of universal access to pre-school. SB 26, which allows for the creation of 1,020 new School Readiness slots, is a positive step in this direction. In addition, the specification to extend the reach of these slots into Alliance and

Competitive districts targets many children who, to this point, have not had access to affordable programs of high quality.

As Bill 26 is being more fully developed, we urge that Readiness Councils and providers, who are familiar with the nuances of adding capacity, be tapped to inform the legislative process. Allowing for *flexibility* in the distribution of slots, based on the expertise of Councils and providers, will ensure that these new opportunities are distributed with an efficient and intentional approach. With this guidance we can be assured that the technicalities of building capacity do not interfere with progress. We know this can be accomplished and are excited that many more children would have access to early education experiences and reap the benefit of a strong early start.

CAHS is excited that Connecticut is poised to take ambitious steps towards equalizing the societal structure of early care and education. Research clearly links the gains made in early childhood to children's future success. As our knowledge about the benefits of early education are being influenced by research, so should our actions and policies.

Thank you for your consideration.