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Testimony in Support of S.B. 340: An Act Concerning A Two-Generational School Readiness Plan

Good Afternoon Representative Walker, Senator Bye 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.

I am here today in support of SB 340, a bill which addresses the need for Two Generation Programs in Connecticut.

The prevalence of parents lacking high school and post- secondary education in Connecticut is striking. *The United States Census , American Fact Finder* estimates that from 2010-2012 approximately 5,000 babies were born in Connecticut each year to a mother who had not yet completed high school.¹ An additional 8,500 babies were born to a mother who did not have any post -secondary education. Many of these parents are single and are struggling financially. Lack of educational credentials, coupled with the scarcity and expense of quality infant/ toddler care, offer a limited scenario for sustainable employment opportunities. Parents experience the stress and instability of poverty, which in turn has a direct effect on children. It is no wonder that the cycle of generational poverty continues, unchecked.

Comprehensive, Two -Generation learning models address the challenges faced by these fragile families. Programs are built on three concepts: the importance of education for parent and child, the economic supports needed to be successful toward goals, and the building of social capital in the context of the individual parent, the family and the community. Each is deemed an important link toward educational achievement and family resilience. (Ascend, 2014)

Even Start Family Learning Program is one such model that already exists in Connecticut. Program strategy addresses these core concepts through five inter-connected components. (Appendix A) The three Connecticut programs provide education for both parent and child **and** provide a portal to the supports and community programs needed for family stabilization. Programs build on, but do not duplicate, available services. A parenting education component ensures that parents have access to the information and tools needed to become a partner in their child's education. Social

¹ *The United States Census , American Fact Finder*: Table 13014: Women 15-50 years Who Had a Birth in The Last 12 Months By Marital Status and Educational Attainment

Capital is built through mentored parent /child engagement activities, facilitated peer support and community connections.

Program objectives, measured twice yearly, specify that programs must address and *be accountable* for:

- parents outcomes toward their educational goals
- child outcomes toward strong developmental growth
- growth in Parenting Towards Literacy , measuring positive parenting influence on children’s lives

The Even Start Coalition, with input and guidance from the Office of Early Childhood, has been working on a strategic planning model that would push two- generation programs forward and secure a more intentional place in Connecticut’s future early childhood system. (Appendix B) Several pieces of research have been done which demonstrate need and results.²

Uniquely, two gen programs measure outcomes across the family, not in the context of children or adults. Impact is realized in the short and long term. In the short term, parents become engaged in their own learning toward their educational goals and meaningful employment. Children are receiving a strong start in quality programs and those with suspected developmental delays are identified early. In the long term, families are more stable, children are transitioned into quality early education programs and most important, parents take an active role in their child’s educational progress. As research shows, a parent’s involvement in their child’s education is directly correlated to the success of the child.³

Nationally, the role and importance of two generation programs is getting much attention. Ascend, an arm of The Aspen Institute, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation are all espousing the benefits of integrating “two-generational” programs into the system of supports available for vulnerable families. At the 2013 Aspen Institute *Forum on Innovations in Early Childhood*, Carla Thomson of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation stated, “We see a Two Generation Strategy as part of the work. The lens is families and children. We’re thinking two- gen because children don’t live outside the context of their families.”

CAHS applauds Governor Malloy and this Committee for including the Even Start Two- Generation Family Learning Program in the 2013-2015 Biennial Budget. Now is the time to grow the concept of two- generational programs, providing access and hope to many more families across the state. By doing so, Connecticut will be at the forefront of a national movement towards two-gen learning.

² Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis; Long Term Outcomes of Connecticut Even Start Participants Dr. Fred Carstensen , Dr. Kathryn Parr

³ Wesleyan University Community Research Seminar, Middletown Even Start; Measuring Parental Involvement in Education; Spring 2009

