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Testimony before the Education Committee on S.B. 912

Gwen Pastor, Policy Analyst, Connecticut Association for Human Services, March 1, 2017

Good afternoon, Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Gwen Pastor, and I am a 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 and program initiatives.

I am testifying regarding S.B. 912, An Act Concerning Revisions to the Staff Qualifications Requirement for Early Childhood Educators.

For many years it was accepted that early childhood educators do not need high levels of education, leading to an early childcare system with underqualified and underpaid teachers. However, growing awareness of the importance of the early years of a child's life created a shift in this belief. We now know the importance of providing high-quality early learning experiences to the children of our state, and understand that employing highly-qualified staff, with specialties in early learning, is integral to early childhood programs and the success of Connecticut's children.

For this reason, in previous sessions, Connecticut's legislature changed the general statutes to require certain staff qualifications of lead teachers in early childhood education programs accepting state funds for their child day care program or school readiness programs. We applaud and encourage these efforts to increase the quality of care and education in Connecticut's early childhood programs. However, the requirement that early educators have a degree only from one of the five approved institutions of higher education is excessively restrictive, leading to an insufficient pool of well-qualified early childhood educators for early childhood programs to hire. We are very thankful to the Education Committee for recognizing this gap and attempting to remedy this problem.

Currently, only 61% of classrooms have staff that meet the 2020 bachelor's degree requirement, and of those staff, 85% were grandfathered in. The current requirements in the statutes limit the acceptable institutions of higher learning from which a person can obtain a

degree to institutions of higher education accredited by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or Office of Higher Education and regionally accredited, provided such degree program is approved by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or the Office of Higher Education and the Office of Early Childhood. Of the 61% of classrooms that have staff meeting the 2020 BA requirements, only 15% met the requirement by graduating from one of the five approved institutions or going through the individual route to certification; the rest were grandfathered in. This indicates an insufficient pipeline of qualified early childhood education providers in our current system of education. Limiting candidates to only those with degrees from one of the five approved Connecticut programs excludes many highly qualified candidates who attended out-of-state institutions. This greatly limits the pool of well-qualified teachers for our programs. To remedy this, CAHS would support expanding the standards of qualifications to allow students with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, child development, or human growth and development from any college in the country that is accredited by the regional accrediting body. This would allow highly-qualified teachers who graduated from respected and prestigious universities to teach in our early childhood classrooms, widening the pool from which early childhood programs can hire, and would mediate the issues of the lack of teachers to hire, while maintaining high standards for the teachers of Connecticut's young children.

However, CAHS has concerns about the proposed legislation's, S.B. 912, acceptance of those who have a bachelor's degree in an unrelated major and twelve early childhood credits, as it would classify a person with a bachelor's degree in any area as qualified to provide a high-quality education to Connecticut's children, as long as they have 12 credits in areas of early childhood education. We feel this is insufficient for the well-being of Connecticut's children and believe there must be further guidance about what concentration a person's bachelor's degree is in. This was an appropriate standard for those who were already working in their field when the law changed, but there is a real difference between someone with a criminal justice major who took a couple of early childhood courses and someone who has majored in early childhood.

We appreciate that Connecticut recognizes the importance of early childhood and invests in high-quality systems of early care and education. However, we encourage maintaining high standards for our early childhood educators, while also ensuring a steady pipeline and pool of well-qualified educators for our programs.