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## **Testimony before the Education Committee on H.B. 7155**

*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 in favor of H.B. 7155, An Act Requiring the Office of Early Childhood to Develop a Proposed Early Childhood Educator Compensation Schedule.

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 subsequently implemented educational standards for early childhood educators. However, the current wages of early childhood teachers does not reflect their required levels of education and experience. In order to maintain a steady stream of highly-educated, well-qualified early childhood educators, we must pay them a wage consistent with their education, experience, and importance in the lives of Connecticut's children.

H.B. 7155 requires the Office of Early Childhood to establish and implement a compensation schedule for early care teachers working in state-funded programs. The schedule would be structured to be commensurate with an educator's level of education level, experience in the field, and Connecticut's cost of living. Implicit is the need for the Office of Early Childhood to budget and provide additional funding to allow for the increases in salaries. This bill is an important and necessary step to ensure the continued availability of well-qualified early care teachers.

In 2015, the State of Connecticut established minimum required credentials for teachers and educators in publically funded centers, which gradually require all lead teachers to hold

bachelor's degrees by 2020. Qualified, well-trained teachers are crucial for early childhood providers.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that employing highly-educated early care teachers has an immediate effect on learning. Well-qualified teachers make early care and education more effective, and high-quality early care programs provide the stable and developmentally appropriate learning environment that children need to thrive. However, retaining highly-qualified teachers is difficult when the compensation is not commensurate with one's education and experience and many centers have had difficulty meeting the deadline. There are several reasons for this, including a limited number of approved institutions from which a person could receive an acceptable degree, but one of the primary reasons is that early childhood teachers do not receive salaries appropriate for someone with a four-year degree.

According to the recently released Office of Early Childhood workforce plan, the average readiness teacher in a public school earns an average annual salary of \$53,045 for the school year, while the average annual salary for a teacher in a community provider readiness program is \$33,939.<sup>2</sup> Despite performing similar tasks and holding similar levels of education, a community provider earns almost \$20,000 less per year than a public school teacher.

The cost of a college education makes it prohibitive to work in a field that requires a college degree without promising earning potential. With current wages, certified teachers and recent graduates are much more likely to pursue careers in public school systems than in subsidized early care centers. Directors are finding that as their staff members attain degrees, they often leave their center for public schools, where they can earn a wage conducive with their education and experience. In order to sustain an effective, well-qualified workforce for Connecticut's early care and education system, the state needs to increase funding to a level that can allow providers to attract well-qualified workers. H.B. 7155 would initiate this, ensuring that there is a plan in place to compensate early childhood educators at levels that reflect their education levels and experience.

We realize that this is a difficult time and tough decisions need to be made. However, it is possible to begin researching and developing a compensation scale, while also planning for its future implementation. If we are to continue our high standards in early care and education and provide quality educational experiences for our children, then we need to more intentionally consider the dilemma of teachers' wages.

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research. 2013. "Highly Qualified Teachers: The Workforce Early Education Needs and Deserves." <http://nieer.org/2013/06/03/highly-qualified-teachers-the-workforce-early-educations-needs-and-deserves>

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. 2016. A Plan to Assist Early Education State Dunfed Providers to Degree Attainment and Increased Compensation.