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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

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H.B. No. 5449 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE ALIGNMENT AND MERGING OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM FUNDING STREAMS, ELIGIBILITY, RATES AND POLICIES

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

My name is Elizabeth Fraser, and I am the Policy Manager for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). A statewide nonprofit that works to promote economic success for children and families through policy and program work, CAHS appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. No. 5449, An Act Concerning The Alignment And Merging Of Early Care And Education Program Funding Streams, Eligibility, Rates And Policies. **Specifically, CAHS seeks to emphasize that funding for existing programs, including child care subsidies, the school readiness program, the Nurturing Families Network, among others, should not supplant funding for the Office of Early Childhood.**

To authorize the Commissioner of Early Childhood to retain up to two per cent of certain appropriations for the purpose of evaluating and improving child care programs, to revise state law to be in compliance with federal law, to authorize the commissioner to review and establish rates for school readiness programs, and to expand the use of unexpended school readiness funds to assist in services for children transitioning into preschool and from preschool to kindergarten.

We acknowledge and are grateful for your work in negotiating and passing the FY18-19 biennial budget. While difficult choices were necessary and cuts were implemented, we are realistic and realize they could have been far worse. As this will again be a difficult budget year, CAHS' position is that we cannot afford to cut any more dollars from early care and education programs. We feel the responsible choice is for the state to find new sources of revenue to keep programs for low income, working families intact. This is especially important for those that serve very young children.

CAHS is advocating for the full funding of the Office of Early Childhood, the Care4Kids program, and Connecticut's various wraparound support programs, home visiting, and parent training programs, behavioral and developmental interventions, school readiness programs, and two-generational programs which address needs of both children and caregivers at home and in the classroom.

The Office of Early Childhood

The creation of the Office of Early Childhood and the coordination of early care programs and initiatives is one of the most important achievements of the legislature. It demonstrates Connecticut's understanding of the unique needs of our youngest children, the value of early care and education and it codifies our commitment to the future. Early childhood programs represent a robust, long-term investment in our state's future that strengthen the stability of our working families and ensure the success of our youngest residents. We believe the independence of the OEC from other agencies uniquely positions it as a convener, coordinator, and voice for all children and families. We are very excited about some of the promising initiatives that are being explored by the OEC and believe that it needs the support and funding for existing programs to thrive and to bring some of these innovative ideas to fruition.

Care4Kids funding must be preserved to support a healthy workforce and childhood development

Fully funding the state's primary childcare subsidy is crucial to prevent further program closures and to allow low income parents to participate fully in the workforce knowing their children are safe in high-quality, reliable child care.¹

As detailed in an [expanded policy brief](#)² available on CAHS's website, in just over one year, the temporary closure of the Care4Kids program had marked negative impacts on Connecticut working families, children, and child care providers around the state, and has had a disproportionate impact on communities of color. Over 1,000 early care providers, who relied on the subsidy to be able to provide care, had to reduce services or close. Notably, of the 16 communities that account for two-thirds of Care4Kids enrollment, 15 of them include some of the highest populations of children of color in the state.³

With support from the Committee, the funding included in the FY18-19 Connecticut budget has allowed the program to re-open. Additionally, the authorization by the federal government of an increase in the Child Care Development Block Grant could mean potentially provide Connecticut with up to \$18 million in additional federal Care4Kids funding. However, it is important to note that this additional funding is intended to **supplement existing resources, not supplant the appropriated funding**. In a state where the average annual costs of child care was \$19,521, or 28 percent of the median household income for a family of four in 2016⁴, it is essential to the health of our families, children, and economy that we protect funding for the Care4Kids program. Care for kids subsidies, along with our other early care and education subsidies including school readiness, state funded childcare centers and smart start, constitute and growing system that is an vital economic support for working families and their children.

Two Generation Systems Change

¹ A survey of 191 early childcare providers conducted by the Early Childhood Alliance and CAHS on the impact of the Care4Kids closure showed that some low-income parents could not afford to continue working when they lost their Care4Kids subsidy.

²https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ctassetbuilding/pages/97/attachments/original/1520609010/Care4Kids_Policy_Brief_Supplemental_Testimony_%285%29.pdf?1520609010

³https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ctassetbuilding/pages/97/attachments/original/1520609010/Care4Kids_Policy_Brief_Supplemental_Testimony_%285%29.pdf?1520609010

⁴ Schulte, Brigid, and Alieza Durana. The New America Care Report. New America, Washington D.C.,2016, The New America Care Report,na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/FINAL_Care_Report.pdf.

This bill indicates that you are looking for cost efficiencies; we believe that through the working advisory board of the two generation statute we might begin to start considering the benefits and potential of integrated cross agency partnerships.

Family-facing state agencies and systems are presently structured as distinct entities, with idiosyncratic processes, procedures and funding streams. Families must navigate independent systems each with its own set of barriers that impede family success. Rarely do programs and agencies work together around the needs of a whole family. Additionally, parent voice is rarely taken into consideration when programs and initiatives are designed and implemented. Legislation passed in 2017 modifies the two generation legislation into a systems change approach.

Children live in families, and family circumstances have impact on developing children. CAHS believes that for Connecticut to be stronger economically we need to identify, acknowledge and act upon barriers to family economic success.

We know that a parent's level of education correlates with a child's future academic success. The two generation initiative seeks to find and implement innovative ways to efficiently coordinate our resources to give poor and low income parents the real ability to further their education or participate in longer term training programs. Parents' successes will have a doubling effect by exposing their children to greater opportunity. Several programs already do this, including Even Start. However, individual programs need the systemic help to provide for families. This can be done by carefully researching and developing integrated funding strategies, that could be used to support both parent and child together, without necessarily needing an individual line item. This quote sums it up, "It is not reasonable to expect children to be the only change agent in a family." For children to be successful, we need to make it easier for parents to succeed. This is both an economic and moral issue.

Early childhood services constitute long run savings by setting children up for success

While early childhood programs demand significant investments, a growing body of research has suggested that targeted interventions in the critical window of early childhood have the greatest potential for increasing the future educational and workforce attainment of children, expanding employment opportunities for parents, reducing future social services spending, and increasing the likelihood that less advantaged children will end up in the middle class.⁵ Among the crucial programs available to Connecticut children, the Birth to Three System, and other behavioral health supports are essential to providing low-income babies and children with a pathway to achievement. Similarly, multigenerational initiatives like the Nurturing Families Network, Home Visiting Program, and Even Start holistically address the needs of children and families, ensuring that children arrive at our schools safe and ready to learn.

Cuts to early childhood education services and programs constitute a blow to the future of our state. As such, we urge the Committee to protect vital early childhood services and the work of the Office of Early Childhood Education.

CAHS supports and appreciates the work of the Appropriations Committee in ensuring that Connecticut children and families are afforded the early childhood education resources and opportunities they need to get

⁵ Sawhill, I. V., & Karpilow, Q. (2014). How Much Could We Improve Children's Life Chances by Intervening Early and Often?. *CCF Brief*, 54.

ahead and stay ahead. For additional information CAHS's policy priorities regarding fair scheduling and working family issues, please contact CAHS Policy Manager Elizabeth Fraser at efraser@cahs.org.