**Testimony of Merrill Gay in favor of HB 5213**

***AN ACT CONCERNING ORAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS OF CHILDREN.***

Public Health Committee

March 5th , 2018

Co Chairs Gerratana, Somers and Steinberg, and Members of the Committee: My name is Merrill Gay and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a coalition of over a hundred organizations ranging from individual childcare programs to statewide research and advocacy organizations. We represent a wide range of organizations that care for, and about, our youngest children.

We strongly support of HB 5213 “An Act Concerning Oral Health Assessments of Children. Requiring an Oral Health assessment along with a physical prior to kindergarten entrance just makes sense. Even with the strides Connecticut has made increasing access to dental care children covered by HUSKY, a recent study done for the Department of Public health still showed that 1 in 3 kindergarteners and 2 in 5 third graders had experienced dental decay. Requiring an oral health exam prior to kindergarten is a relatively simple and straightforward way to get more children in to see a dentist or hygienist. Early treatment and parental education are key to preventing future decay. In particular we support the provision that would allow oral health assessments to take place in licence childcare that serves low income children.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that our youngest children have a bright future here in Connecticut.