

**Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing:
Thursday, February 13, 2020**

**OPPOSE PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS IN 2020-2021 STATE OF CONNECTICUT,
DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD – CARE-4-KIDS FUNDING**

Good afternoon:

My name is Gary Nielsen and I am the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Operating Officer of Easterseals of Greater Waterbury. Easterseals is a not-for-profit agency that operates four Children's Academies in the Cities of Waterbury and Meriden that provides quality pre-school education and daycare for over 375 children.

Our Children's Academies are an indispensable resource for families with pre-school aged children and infants and toddlers.

We operate the academies year-round to prepare our pre-school children with an early education foundation to learn their letters, teaching them to read, write, count and their development of social skills that they will draw upon as they enter kindergarten. We teach our children to love to learn and explore. We also provide quality, safe, reliable daycare for working/student families with infants and toddlers.

With escalating costs in employee benefits, the pressure of rising minimum wages, minimum educational requirements for our very special teachers (who could make close to double in a public school classroom), as well as, general rising expenses, these proposed cuts simply cannot be allowed to occur.

It was just last year that Care-4-Kids was opened up again after a freeze in the program for new parent and guardian applications to be accepted. The proposal to cut the budget will lead to a reduction in overall funding, a reduction in the number of families qualified for the Care-4-Kids program and a hardship to families and providers who are relying upon these dollars to fund wages and benefits for teachers, care givers and support staff who do their work, not for the money, but for the love of education and the children.

The see-saw of increase in one year followed by proposed cuts in a following year are simply not justified. The pre-school children and the agencies that educate them deserve better treatment by our Governor and Legislature.

I am here to testify against any proposed cuts to the OEC budget for Care-4-Kids. Full-funding must be restored, and should be increased.

Thank you for your time and consideration.