



Testimony regarding HB 6439

Testimony by Georgia Goldburn,

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Good afternoon Sen. Oster, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Georgia Goldburn, and I live in Middletown.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on the Governor's proposed budget. Specifically, I would like to testify about a small part of the DCF budget. I have been the director of Hope For New Haven for 15 years. Hope For New Haven is a faith-based nonprofit located in New Haven, CT and manages the Hope Child Development Center, a licensed 77-capacity facility serving children 6 weeks to 13 years old. I am also the co-founder of CERCLE, a network of over 80 childcare providers serving children and families of color, for whom Hope serves as the fiscal sponsor.

In my role as supporting providers throughout the CERCLE network, I have been inundated by heart wrenching stories of providers struggling to keep their businesses financially afloat especially during the pandemic. CERCLE worked tirelessly to ensure that providers could access the resources that they needed to keep themselves, their staff and their families safe while navigating this unprecedented event. And while many providers, who were already teetering on the financial edge, struggled with dramatic reductions in their revenue, their situation was made much worse by the long persistent pattern of late payments by the Department of Children and Families.

Providers who kept their doors open during the pandemic to respond to the Governor's call to support front line workers, were forced to wait for months to get paid for services rendered. This left many of our CERCLE network providers to feel disrespected and despondent, when their efforts to communicate their desperation to the Department went largely unheard. As a child care provider, I can attest to the fact

that our organization has had to wait as long as a year to be paid for services rendered. For a large organization like Hope, it puts a strain on our budget, so I am particularly sensitive to the incredible strain that this puts on smaller childcare and family daycare providers.

A survey of providers at one of our statewide meetings showed that while a little over 50% are still committed to serving the Department, they expressed that they cannot continue to do so under these circumstances. As for Hope, we have reduced the number of DCF children that we provide care for, to limit our agency's financial exposure. And sadly, last year we decided as an organization not to re-enter into a contract with the Department to become a credentialed provider.

It was not a decision that we took lightly and is more than open to reconsidering this, if the DCF childcare line item was transferred to the Office of Early Childhood. I would like to make note this this is a move that should have occurred during the creation of the OEC. In fact, this final transfer of funds would fulfill the original intent of the creation of the OEC, which was to bring all early care and education dollars under one agency resulting in a more streamlined funding process and the elimination of redundancies.

Connecting DCF childcare payment to the Care 4 Kids portal will not only solve the payment issues for providers but would also address one of DCF's concerns as well. DCF must manually check childcare invoices against the Care 4 Kids system to ensure accuracy of billing and flag duplicative payments. This process is highly inefficient and time consuming and would be eliminated if both subsidies resided in the Care 4 Kids payment system. It also required DCF to hire additional staff to help to work this highly ineffective process. As I listen to the tough decisions that this committee is forced to make to establish a just budget for CT's residents, this presents a clear choice.

CT needs to move towards building a more equitable childcare system that works for children and families. It is in our long-term interest to strengthen our childcare providers and move towards processes that ensure financial stability for providers like Hope. Moving the DCF childcare subsidy to OEC and connecting it to the Care 4 Kids portal is good for children, families, childcare providers, and CT taxpayers.

Thank you for considering this issue.