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H.B. 6439, AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR
Appropriations Committee
March 9, 2021**

Representative Walker, Senator Osten and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

My name is John Cattelan and I represent the Connecticut Alliance of YMCAs. The Alliance represents 21 YMCAs across the state of Connecticut. The Alliance would like to share some of its concerns regarding H.B. 6439, which is the budget introduced by Governor Lamont.

Before I share my concerns, we would like to thank Governor Lamont for increasing the Early Care and Education line item by 6.4% or \$8,029,131. This budget item funds the School Readiness program. During the past twenty years, the line item has received one rate increase of three percent. During that same time, the minimum wage has increased by over 50% and inflation has risen by almost 50% as well. The Connecticut Alliance of YMCAs supports this increase.

However, we do have concerns with the Governor's budget proposal.

The proposed budget doesn't provide funds to raise Care4Kids provider payment rates despite the fact that CT only pays at the 50th percentile of the market for infants and toddlers and only the 25th percentile for preschool while the federal government recommends paying at the 75th percentile of the market rate.

In addition, we believe their needs to be an investment in the Care4Kids program that opens eligibility to the following categories of parents who have previously been ineligible to participate in the program:

- Parents in the Even Start program or other Adult Education programs approved by the OEC Commissioner
- Parents in Job training programs, and
- Parents enrolled in postsecondary education programs
- Provides a ½ time child care certificate for 90 days to help unemployed parents seek employment.

Many residents of Connecticut have become unemployed as a result of the pandemic and unfortunately many employers went out of business. This means that many parents will need to change careers and many will need to train for new jobs. That is why changing the eligibility requirements for Care4Kids is vitally important.

Connecticut is one of only two states that makes no provision for child care subsidies for parents in job training or school. Lack of reliable child care is a major barrier for parents attempting to further their education or complete job training.

Quality childcare will become a necessity if our state's economy is to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Finally, while we realize final payments to state and local government from the Federal Government via the second and possibly third Cares Act may or have not been finalized when Governor Lamont introduced his budget. We strongly urge that some of these funds be used for out of school time, including summer camp.

Connecticut received \$28 million for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund and \$492 million for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund in the second Cares Act.

The YMCA is prepared to be a community partner and work with schools to overcome the challenges facing students, families and communities. To effectively combat COVID learning loss, in- and out-of-school learning needs to be connected and seamless. We have the capacity and expertise to support schools and help achieve positive outcomes for students. The Y is ready to work with education leaders at all levels to meet the academic, social, emotional, physical, and nutritional needs of children.

In coordination with school partners, YMCA programs can help combat both COVID-19 and summer learning loss and help prepare students for the 2021-2022 school year. The Y believes a community-wide approach is necessary to respond to COVID-19 and meet student needs.

Besides trying to address learning loss, the children of Connecticut, in particular children from distressed municipalities, also need to have fun and physical activity this summer. Not only do they need it, they deserve it as a result of the pandemic.

The research is clear that afterschool and summer learning programs have a solid evidence base to effectively support students and help them with learning recovery and thrive.