

Appropriations Committee

Public Hearing, March 9, 2021

Testimony Submitted by: Edie Reichard

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Edie Reichard and I am the Director of Sleeping Giant Day Care, Inc. and also the Co-chair of the State Funded Child Development Centers Director's Forum. The Director's Forum represents over 103 child care centers serving over 4,000 children birth to school age throughout Connecticut. Established by the Legislature over 50 years ago the Centers ensure low - moderate income working families have access to high quality, affordable child care.

The pandemic brought the issue of access to affordable child care for families to the forefront of the public consciousness. During the past year countless articles were written revealing the lack of child care and the negative impact it has on families and the overall economy. There can be no doubt that the child care industry is critical to Connecticut's economy and the well being of children and families.

The Director's Forum members appreciate the long-term commitment the legislature has made to funding child care and they recognize the many competing interests for funding that this Committee grapples with to meet obligations and balance a state budget. We believe it is imperative to invest more dollars in child care to sustain an industry that has long been underfunded. Connecticut families need to go back to work, engage in job training, and seek higher education.

In order to do this, child care subsidies in the Care4Kids program need to be increased. Connecticut only pays at the 50th percentile of the market rate for infant and toddlers and only the 25th percentile for preschool while the federal government recommends payments at the 75th percentile of market rate. From 2002 to 2019 there were no increases in payment rates for programs! We cannot go backwards now!

We appreciate the increase in the Early Care and Education line item, but this increase does not account for the increase in the minimum wage and the impact of having to raise everyone's salary. I have an employee who started last year and is working on her associate's degree in early childhood education. She was hired in July 2020 at \$11.00 per hour and in September 2020 she went up to \$12.00 per hour. In less than 3 years if she continues to work for us (and does not leave for a higher paying job in a different field) she will be making \$15.00 per hour. That is a \$4.00 per hour raise in less than 4 years. I have a teacher who has her Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education who has worked for me for 6 years and she started at

\$14.50 per hour and is now making \$15.39 per hour. That is an 89 cent per hour raise is the last 6 years. Those were considered cost of living raises given at a rate we could barely afford to give. As we hire new employees (if we can find them) who have lesser degrees begin at higher per hour rates and keep increasing these rates, we also have to increase the rates per hour of our teachers with higher degrees at the same comparative percentage as those with lesser degrees. As the rate increases are going up, we will be out of business before we can afford to pay any increased rates.

Child care staff is mandated to acquire B.A's and be well educated, but our teachers are among the lowest paid professionals in the teaching field. Centers struggles to recruit and retain teachers with B.A.'s as they can get better paying jobs in the public school system.

Investment in child care must be a priority to help families go back to work; especially low-income minority families hit the hardest by the pandemic.

We also urge you to fully fund the OEC programs and restore the proposed cuts. Research demonstrates that early prevention and intervention programs have the greatest return on investment.

Thank you taking the time to read this testimony.

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