

# Education Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6686

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF

**Title:** EARLY CHILDHOOD.

**Vote Date:** 3/17/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/22/2023

**File No.:** 404

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill reacts to the early childhood educators labor shortage issue by simplifying the requirements for QSM (Qualified Staff Members), thereby offering a pathway for non-ECE degree holders to QSM compliance and sets timed benchmarks for staff working towards bachelor's degrees. Addressing concerns with lack of access to early child care, the bill additionally would expand access of the school readiness statutes to include children age birth to two years of age. The bill also eliminates the requirement for any child care day rate increase to go only into staff compensation to financially assist the child care facilities with the various increases in operation costs.

In response to safety concerns at some child care centers, the bill includes language to allow the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to order a medical examination during an investigation of a child care facility. Further, the proposed requirement allowing the sharing of unredacted information by OEC to law enforcement aligns with the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) authority to share information with law enforcement officials.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language for this bill removes new staff qualification requirements for lead teachers in state-funded child care programs, removes the requirement for the OEC commissioner to create a two-tiered income eligibility threshold for Care 4 Kids, keeps the formerly repealed Early Childhood Teacher Credential (ECTC), and requires OEC to consult with DPH to develop best practices for ordering medical exams from child care workers rather than allow OEC to require exams in investigations related to child care services.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Office of Early Childhood (OEC), Commissioner, Beth Bye:** states that expanding the School Readiness programs to include younger toddlers and infants would help to address the current shortage of infant and toddler care spaces and overall help communities better meet the needs of families. They mention the presence of “child care deserts” within the state where young children are not receiving consistent care due to issues like lack of access and cost. In reference to the changes in requirements for Qualified Staff members, they also state that the proposed changes would help create a clearer pathway for certification.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), Legislative Chair, Andrew Feinstein:** states that the expanded eligibility proposed within this bill is an appropriate measure to take but notes the importance of ensuring that the School Resource Programs (SRPs) have the necessary resources and capacity to also provide care to students with disabilities (both children designated with disabilities and children who need disability care but have not been deemed eligible). They note that students enrolled in special education programs are often left behind at a critical point of cognitive development for all children and that early intervention at younger ages can drastically change the trajectory of a child’s disability. They add that a one size fits all approach will not work here and urges adequate funding of SRPs, as this field is already dealing with staffing issues and further expansion of eligibility will only increase the need for workers.

**The following individuals submitted testimony in support of this bill.** They specifically support the simplification of staff qualifications, the expansion of the School Readiness programs to include children starting at birth, and the lifted requirement for rate increases to be used exclusively for staff salaries. They express how difficult it has been in recent years to find staff with the required QSM designation, adding that the proposed language in the bill should help hire staff with degrees in other fields if they have at least 12 academic credits specifically in early childhood education. She adds that the current workforce shortage will not likely be solved unless more competitive salaries and better benefits are implemented.

**Torrington Child Care Center, Executive Director, Mary Cecchinato**  
**Sleeping Giant Daycare, Director, Edie Reichard**

**Connecticut Voices for Children, Research Policy Fellow, Dr. Lauren Ruth:** expresses general support for the bill with some concerns about certain sections, namely the changes to the SRP reimbursement rate and the potential lack of funding for increased operating costs and increased staff salaries. They also note concern with the unredacted disclosure of records to law enforcement, particularly when it comes to the safety of information regarding immigration status. They state that without further clarification about what information can be shared, this legislation may lead to a “chilling” effect in this field that would shrink the workforce further. They additionally request that the committee consider a universal child care program which offers affordable and high quality care throughout the state.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

**Connecticut General Assembly, House Minority Leader, Rep. Vincent Candelora:** notes concern regarding the workforce shortages in the child care industry. They express opposition to what they state is an arbitrary phase-in deadline implemented through this bill, stating that it could have the unintended consequence of deepening the labor shortage in the field. They urge the committee to review alternative language proposed in H.B. 5269 and states that it takes a more practical approach of grandfathering current workers and only imposing the new requirements on new educators entering the field.

**Reported by: Joseph Guarna**

**Date: 3/28/2023**