

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6759

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION.

**Vote Date:** 3/24/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

**PH Date:** 3/1/2023

**File No.:**

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

## REASONS FOR BILL:

Early childcare educators with years of experience are still subject to compensation rates close to minimum wage. This has created a deficit of teachers in Connecticut and pushed many educators away from the childcare field. This bill aims to increase early childhood educator compensations as well as make the classroom a safer place to ensure hardworking teachers are able to provide quality education services to the families of Connecticut.

## SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language for this bill incorporates a governor's bill provision allowing the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to create a protective service class in which the commissioner may waive eligibility requirements for at-risk children who meet certain guidelines and adds a section from the governor's bill regarding increasing the per pupil rate for school readiness programs.

The substitute additionally makes several changes and additions related to appropriating funds and providing grants for early childhood programs and educators.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC), Commissioner, Beth Bye;** states that the office appreciates the intent of increasing wages for early care and education professionals and to continue the expansion of Care 4 Kids income eligibility, however, these changes are in not included in the Governor's budget and therefore would be difficult to enact.

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**Bristol Child Development Center, Executive Director, Maegan Adams;** supports this bill stating as early childhood education is a fundamental building block for learning, and if the childcare sector collapses, thousands of adults will be unable to work which will lead CT into a recession.

**TVCCA Head Start, Assistant Director, Elizabeth Anderson;** supports this bill as a parent and a childhood professional, stating this bill will allow for early childhood success while providing support, education, and early intervention for our next and future generations.

**Educational Consultant, Elizabeth Aschenbrenner;** supports this bill stating quality early childhood experiences make a tremendous difference in outcomes for children, while also urges the committee to support increasing payments to the state funded early care programs.

**CSDNB, School Readiness Liaison, Christopher Badenhop;** supports this bill stating having worked in early childhood programs for the last 23 years, he has been exposed to the disparities of low wages for this critically important job. This bill will allow for programs to increase staff salaries, pay for their overhead, and ensure more childcare centers stay open.

**Assistant Teacher, Leann Bailey;** supports this bill stating proper wages for staff will further allow highly quality candidates to seek employment at centers, help minimize staff turnover, and further provide quality services and education for families who need this service.

**Connecticut Children's Museum, Executive Director, Jessica Bialecki;** supports this bill stating funds are needed for early childcare programs to continue providing the high level of quality care and instruction that families need and rely on.

**Plymouth Family Resource Center, Coordinator, Lori Borysewicz;** supports this bill stating teacher's wages need to be increased as the future of Connecticut's children depend on it, as they need competent and qualified teachers to prepare them for the world they will someday be leading.

**Public Middle School Teacher, Laurel Brandon;** supports this bill stating more funding is needed to enable childcare professionals to earn a living wage without stretching the finances of families to the point that one parent (usually a woman) must give up their career to avoid paying for care.

**Storrs Community Children's Center, Teacher, Ashley Brock;** supports this bill stating children are impacted by how many teachers they see come and go as a result of low wages, and they need consistency in their lives.

**Torrington Child Care Center, Director, Mary Cecchinato;** supports this bill stating her staff does not get compensated fairly for the quality of work they perform every day, but states that what is missing from the bill is the way in which it will be paid.

**Alphabet Academy, Teacher, Allie Cristante;** supports this bill stating as a single mom, she feels as if her family cannot survive on her teacher's salary and questions whether a career path as a teacher is sustainable.

**Mansfield Community Children’s Center, Executive Director, Lisa Dahn;** supports this bill stating through decades of directing the program she has had to field many conversations with educators resigning from CCC and the profession because of low wages.

**Riverfront Children’s Center, Assistant Site Director, Bray Deppen;** supports this bill stating if children are our future, then we need to invest in children, and we need to invest in those people who not only have their own children, but those who dedicate their lives to other people’s children as well.

**Child’s World, Owner & Director, Anne Evans;** supports this bill stating finding the childcare industry is a necessary investment in long-term transformation.

**CAHS, Policy Director, Liz Fraser;** supports this bill stating in order to keep young adults in the state, and attract a young and vibrant workforce to Connecticut, then we need to value early care and education as a public good, give businesses the employees they need to grow our economy, parents the opportunity to be financially secure in our state, and children a strong early start.

**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Executive Director, Merrill Gay;** supports this bill stating rebuilding a well-trained and well compensated workforce of early educators is critically important for the optimal development of the state’s young children and to enable parents to participate in the workforce to solve Connecticut’s broader workforce shortage.

**CASTLE, School Age Director, Kim Hagan;** supports this bill stating working in childcare and receiving lower than cost of living wages has made it extremely difficult to secure quality staff members and maintain a low turnover rate.

**CT Physician, Sarah Hilding;** supports this bill stating low wages in early childhood education lead to insufficient availability of care and high turnover rates, which in turn have negative impacts on children and working families.

**Pediatrician and Community Allergist, Kelsey Kaman;** supports this bill stating stocking epinephrine in childcare centers for trained individuals in emergency situations will reduce food allergy reactions in schools.

**UConn Child Development Laboratories, Executive Director, Marianne Legassey;** supports this bill stating students in the early childhood education program quickly become dismayed at the low salary waiting for them at the conclusion of their four years of education and training.

**TVCCA, Family Advocate, Rosalinda Lopez;** supports this bill stating this bill will allow for childcare centers to retain good hard-working staff with good pay while expecting them to do the hard work that it takes to nurture Connecticut’s future – the children.

**Hispanic Coalition Waterbury, Executive Director, Victor Lopez;** supports this bill and the increased funding of childcare centers, but urges the legislature to amend HB 6759 to include Family Child Care Incubator Projects in the budget and administration of the Office of Early Childhood.

**Alphabet Academy, Director, Amy Mason-Mann;** supports this bill stating she has witnessed an increase in turnover since COVID and have found it quite difficult to find and sustain qualified teachers interested in working in this struggling field, and the new generation of our youth don't want to work in the demanding, underpaid occupation of early childhood.

**St. Saviour's Nursery School, Assistant Director, Chirstine Miles;** supports this bill stating last year her center lost 15% of its workforce because teachers who loved their job sought jobs that could better provide for their basic economic needs, and it is equally difficult to recruit qualified staff due to the low wages and lack of healthcare and retirement benefits in our profession.

**Carrot Patch Early Learning Center, Owner & Director, Suzanne Miller;** supports this bill stating the early education field is extremely demanding and it has been steadily losing our educated, experienced staff to other sector employment with more flexibility, better benefits, and higher wages.

**CWCSEO, Children's Policy Analyst, Thomas Nuccio;** supports this bill stating early childhood educators deserve equitable pay for their role in teaching children in their early stages of life, as these are the most formative years for brain development.

**Norwalk Early Childhood Council, Early Childhood Coordinator, Mary Oster;** supports this bill stating the current mean salary of a childcare educator with a decade of experience is about \$30,000 in Connecticut. Childcare educators are expected to be well-educated, but many earn starting salaries that are lower than fast food workers.

**TVCCA Little Learner, Director, Debbi Poirier;** supports this bill stating the rapid increase in entry level wages throughout the economy has left early care programs struggling to retain and attract staff, as many have classrooms that cannot open and childcare slots that cannot be filled due to lack of required staff.

**Sleeping Giants Day Care, Director, Edie Reichard;** supports this bill stating the rapid increase in entry level wages throughout the economy has left early care programs struggling to retain and attract staff.

**Allergy Force LLC, CEO & Co-Founder, Gayle Rigione;** supports section 4 of this bill stating staff involved in early childhood setting should be legally permitted to administer epinephrine to a child for an anaphylactic emergency, whether the child has a formal diagnosis and designated prescription available at the facility as it could mean the difference between life or death for that child.

**Alphabet Academy, Infant Head Teacher, Migdalia Rockwell;** supports this bill stating after teaching in the education field for 16 years, and at 55 years old, she is still dedicating her evenings and weekends to babysit to meet ends meet because the wages are not enough.

**Connecticut Voices for Children, Policy Fellow, Lauren Ruth;** supports this bill as it will require care programs receiving state funding to implement the early childhood educator compensation schedule, however, there are concerns regarding the cost bearer of raising early care staff wages.

**Stamford PAL, Police Chief, Timothy Shaw;** supports this bill providing the Stamford Police Activities League, a Stamford based nonprofit youth activities organization, with an exemption from the licensing requirements of An Act Concerning Early Childhood.

**Elijah-Alavi Foundation, Co-Founder & President, Thomas Silvera;** supports section 4 of this bill stating these standards, if enacted, will ensure the safety and wellbeing of children in childcare settings who have food allergies.

**Occupational Fun Edu Daycare, Owner, Dellon Singh;** supports this bill stating implementing the OEC Compensation Scale would finally pay early educators wages comparable to public school staff with the same degrees.

**Allison Rose Foundation / CHFD, Founder / Fire Chief, Michael Suhy;** supports section 4 of this bill stating his daughter died of an allergic reaction when she was a freshman in college, so having epinephrine is necessary for all entities to have to prevent future tragedy.

**CASTLE, Preschool Director, Lindsay Therian;** supports this bill stating Connecticut needs to recruit high quality, experienced educators with the experience and knowledge to support the ever-increasing needs of the children we serve, and the only way to do that is to raise wages.

**Community Children's Center, Program Director, Kate Vallo;** supports this bill stating the quality of early care and education has long been negatively impacted by low wages in the workforce.

**TVCCA, Head Start Director, Andrea Watson;** supports this bill stating without this infrastructure being added to the early childhood field there are concerns that major programs will be impacted, and in turn, families will not have access to childcare.

**Daycare Center Director, Erin Welch;** supports this bill stating as a center director during these challenging times, it is nearly impossible to hire qualified employees to work in the classrooms due to unlivable wages.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Central CT Coast YMCA, SVP COO, Timothy Bartlett;** opposes this bill stating while they support a wage increase for all of Connecticut's childcare workers, this cannot be accomplished without an investment from the state which the current version of the proposed bill does not refer to.

**CT Alliance of YMCAs, VP of Government Relations, John Cattelan;** opposes this bill stating the increase in wages for childcare workers is not included in the Governor's budget, and they cannot afford to increase wages on their own without increasing parent fees that are already very expensive.

**YMCA New Britain, Executive Director, Tracey Madden-Hennessey;** opposes this bill stating there is a shortage of funding to increase wages for all staff with a bachelor's degree in the education field.

**CT Republican Assembly, President, Anne Manusky;** opposes this bill stating they do not support the changes that have been made to the Connecticut public schools over the last few years, and the schools do not need more funding.

**Southington-Cheshire Community YMCA, CEO, Mark Pooler;** opposes this bill stating the average cost of childcare in Connecticut is estimated to be between \$15,000 and \$20,000 a year, so to ask Connecticut families to fund a salary increase for childcare workers is unrealistic.

**Riverfront Children's Center, Executive Director, Susan Radway;** opposes this bill stating mandating a wage increase without an increase in the amount received from the state is unachievable.

**Reported by: Riley St. Pierre**

**Date: 4/5/2023**