



House of Representatives

General Assembly

File No. 596

February Session, 2024

Substitute House Bill No. 5051

House of Representatives, April 22, 2024

The Committee on Appropriations reported through REP. WALKER of the 93rd Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the House, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT ESTABLISHING EARLY START CT.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) As used in this section and
2 sections 2 to 10, inclusive, of this act:

3 (1) "Accredited" means accredited by the National Association for the
4 Education of Young Children, National Association for Family Child
5 Care, Early Head Start or Head Start federal approval, or other
6 nationally recognized accreditations or certifications as approved by the
7 commissioner;

8 (2) "Commissioner" means the Commissioner of Early Childhood;

9 (3) "Office" means the Office of Early Childhood; and

10 (4) "Early Start CT" means the state-funded early care and education
11 system administered by the office that coordinates and facilitates the
12 efficient delivery of early childhood care and education programs for
13 eligible children.

14 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) The Office of Early Childhood
15 shall operate and administer Early Start CT in order to:

16 (1) Provide open access for infants and toddlers and preschool-age
17 children to high-quality programs that promote the health and safety of
18 children and prepare them for school;

19 (2) Provide opportunities for parents to choose among affordable and
20 accredited and Head Start approved programs;

21 (3) Encourage coordination and cooperation among programs and
22 prevent the duplication of services;

23 (4) Recognize the specific service needs and unique resources
24 available to particular municipalities;

25 (5) Prevent or minimize the potential for developmental delay in
26 children prior to their reaching the age of five;

27 (6) Strengthen the family through: (A) Encouragement of family
28 engagement and partnership in a child's development and education,
29 and (B) enhancement of a family's capacity to meet the special needs of
30 the children, including children with disabilities;

31 (7) Reduce educational costs by decreasing the need for special
32 education services for school-age children;

33 (8) Assure that children with disabilities are integrated into programs
34 available to children who do not have disabilities;

35 (9) Improve the availability and quality of Early Start CT programs
36 and their coordination with the services of child care providers;

37 (10) Facilitate the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of the
38 children, families and staff in Early Start CT programs; and

39 (11) Maximize local and federal early childhood education funding
40 to expand capacity and access.

41 Sec. 3. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) The Office of Early Childhood
42 shall establish a sliding fee scale for families participating in Early Start
43 CT. Such sliding scale shall be based on family income and align with
44 the sliding fee scale used in the child care subsidy program described in
45 section 17b-749 of the general statutes.

46 Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) The Commissioner of Early
47 Childhood shall implement policies and procedures necessary to (1)
48 administer the provisions of sections 1 to 3, inclusive, and 5 to 10,
49 inclusive, of this act, (2) implement infant and toddler and school-age
50 ratios and group size requirements, and (3) implement head teacher
51 staffing requirements for programs that serve only school-age children,
52 while in the process of adopting such policies and procedures in
53 regulation form. Any existing regulations relating to infant and toddler
54 and school-age ratios, group size requirements and head teacher
55 staffing requirements for programs that serve only school-age children
56 that are generally applicable to child care centers and group child care
57 homes shall continue to be applicable to such centers and homes that
58 serve infants and toddlers and school-age children until replaced by the
59 policies and procedures described in this section. The commissioner
60 shall post notice of the intent to adopt regulations on the department's
61 Internet web site and the eRegulations System not later than twenty
62 days after the date of implementation of such policies and procedures.
63 Such policies and procedures shall be valid until the time final
64 regulations are adopted.

65 Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As part of Early Start CT, the
66 state, acting by and in the discretion of the Commissioner of Early
67 Childhood, may enter into direct or third-party contracts to provide
68 financial assistance to municipalities, local and regional boards of
69 education, regional educational service centers, family resource centers,
70 Head Start programs, preschool programs, nonprofit organizations,
71 child care centers, group child care homes, family child care homes, as
72 such terms are described in section 19a-77 of the general statutes, and
73 any other programs that meet standards established by the
74 commissioner for the purpose of operating early childhood care and

75 education programs that focus on providing early childhood access
76 based on economic, social or environmental conditions, including in
77 regions with insufficient access to child care. At least sixty per cent of
78 the eligible children participating in Early Start CT and enrolled in a
79 child care center, group child care home or family child care home shall
80 be members of a family that is at or below seventy-five per cent of the
81 state median income. No such financial assistance shall be available to
82 (1) any such child care center, group child care home or family child care
83 home unless such center or home has been licensed by the
84 Commissioner of Early Childhood pursuant to section 19a-80 or 19a-87b
85 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, or (2) any such local or
86 regional board of education or regional educational service center
87 unless the preschool program is approved by the Department of
88 Education. The majority of such programs eligible for such financial
89 assistance shall serve children that reside in or attend programs located
90 in priority school districts pursuant to section 10-266p of the general
91 statutes, former priority school districts or towns with schools deemed
92 severe need schools because forty per cent or more of the lunches served
93 are served to students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunches
94 pursuant to federal law. In determining eligibility for financial
95 assistance, the commissioner may consider (A) a community's
96 participation in the state's subsidized child care subsidy program
97 established pursuant to section 17b-749 of the general statutes, and (B)
98 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's social vulnerability
99 index determined by census tract, and such index may include a review
100 of a community's indices of social, economic, racial, ethnic, housing,
101 transportation and household characteristics as determined by the
102 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

103 (b) Any contract entered into under this section shall be contingent
104 upon available funding and a successful application to a request for
105 proposal issued by the office and informed by the appropriate local or
106 regional governance partner's needs assessment and community plan,
107 as described in section 8 of this act. Any Early Start CT facility that has
108 been approved to operate a child care program financed through the
109 Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority and has received

110 a commitment for debt service from the Department of Social Services,
111 pursuant to section 17b-749i of the general statutes, on or before June 30,
112 2014, and on or after July 1, 2014, from the office are exempt from the
113 requirement for issuance of requests for proposals.

114 (c) The office, in operating and administering Early Start CT, shall
115 allocate an amount up to five per cent of the total funding for each town
116 or city, or, in the case of a regional application, the participating towns
117 or cities, but not more than seventy-five thousand dollars per town or
118 city, for coordination, program evaluation and administration. Such
119 amount shall be increased by an amount equal to local funding provided
120 for early childhood education coordination, program evaluation and
121 administration, not to exceed twenty-five thousand dollars. Each local
122 or regional governance partner, established pursuant to section 8 of this
123 act, shall designate a staff person to be responsible for such
124 coordination, program evaluation and administration and to act as a
125 liaison between the town and the commissioner.

126 (d) Any program under Early Start CT that receives funds pursuant
127 to this section shall not discriminate based on ancestry, race, color,
128 national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation,
129 religion, learning, physical, intellectual or mental disability or any other
130 protected class described in chapter 814c of the general statutes.

131 (e) No funds received as part of Early Start CT under this section shall
132 be used to supplant federal, state or local funding received for early
133 childhood education on behalf of children in an early childhood
134 education program.

135 (f) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027, the office may pay, in an
136 individual contract entered into under this section, a per-child rate, or
137 an equivalent per-classroom rate, that has been determined by the
138 commissioner. The per-child cost paid by the office under this section
139 for each eligible child enrolled in a program under Early Start CT who
140 is three or four years of age and each child who is five years of age and
141 not eligible to enroll in school, pursuant to section 10-15c of the general
142 statutes, shall be at least ten thousand five hundred dollars for each such

143 child, or paid at an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for
144 eighteen children. For each eligible child who is under the age of three
145 and enrolled in an infant or toddler classroom and not in a preschool
146 classroom, the per-child cost paid by the office shall be at least thirteen
147 thousand five hundred dollars for each such child, or paid at an
148 equivalent rate and amount per classroom of eight children. The office
149 shall use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate
150 and incentivize full enrollment.

151 (g) The office may use up to two per cent of funds allocated to the
152 early care and education appropriation to evaluate program
153 effectiveness and impact on participating children, families and
154 programs, including, but not limited to, child outcomes, later school
155 performance, quality standards, professional development and
156 preparation, and parent engagement impact.

157 Sec. 6. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) Except as otherwise provided
158 in subsection (b) of this section, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026,
159 and each fiscal year thereafter, if funds appropriated to the Office of
160 Early Childhood for Early Start CT are not expended by the
161 Commissioner of Early Childhood, an amount up to one million dollars
162 of such unexpended funds may be available (1) for the provision of
163 professional development for early childhood care and education
164 program providers, and staff employed in such programs, provided
165 such programs accept state funds for infant, toddler and preschool slots,
166 or (2) to support early childhood education programs in satisfying the
167 staff qualifications requirements, provided such programs accept state
168 funds. The commissioner shall determine how such unexpended funds
169 shall be distributed.

170 (b) If any unexpended funds described in subsection (a) of this section
171 are not expended by the office under said subsection (a), the
172 commissioner, with the consent of the Secretary of the Office of Policy
173 and Management, may use such unexpended funds to provide support
174 for purposes that include, but are not limited to, (1) assisting programs
175 in meeting and maintaining accreditation requirements, (2) providing

176 training in implementing preschool assessments and curricula,
177 including training to enhance literacy teaching skills, (3) developing and
178 implementing best practices for parents in supporting preschool and
179 kindergarten student learning, (4) developing and implementing
180 strategies for children to successfully transition to preschool and from
181 preschool to kindergarten, including through parental engagement and
182 whole-family supports that may be utilized through the two-
183 generational initiative, established pursuant to section 17b-112l of the
184 general statutes, or through other available resources, and (5) providing
185 for professional development.

186 Sec. 7. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) Any program participating in
187 Early Start CT, including, but not limited to, licensed family child care
188 homes, group child care homes, child care centers and other licensed
189 exempt child care providers and settings, shall be accredited or Early
190 Head Start or Head Start approved not later than three years after
191 entering into a contract with the Office of Early Childhood to serve
192 children under Early Start CT. Any such program that is not accredited
193 shall have an approved program plan not later than twelve months after
194 entering into a contract with the office.

195 Sec. 8. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) There shall be established,
196 within available appropriations, local governance partners to assist in
197 the provision of early care and education in a community under Early
198 Start CT. Two or more towns or school districts and appropriate
199 representatives of groups or entities interested in early childhood
200 education in a region may establish a regional governance partner.

201 (b) The membership of each local or regional governance partner
202 shall reflect the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic composition of the
203 town or region it serves and consist of early care and education
204 stakeholders, including, but not limited to, elected and appointed
205 officials, parents, representatives with expertise in early childhood
206 education, a representative, where applicable, of Smart Start established
207 pursuant to section 10-506 of the general statutes, local education and
208 healthcare providers in the community, a local homeless education

209 liaison, community representatives from a workforce or job training
210 entity and other community representatives who provide services to
211 children.

212 (c) The role and responsibilities of a local or regional governance
213 partner shall include, but are not limited to, (1) conducting and
214 administering a data-driven needs assessment for its respective
215 community or region in accordance with the provisions of subsection (c)
216 of this section, (2) employing strategies to solicit parental engagement
217 and membership, (3) providing periodic technical assistance regarding
218 best practices in early childhood and family engagement for its town or
219 region, (4) jointly sponsoring with the office, professional development
220 opportunities, and (5) ensuring that community outreach is regularly
221 conducted and maintained with community stakeholders.

222 (d) Each local or regional governance partner shall, within available
223 appropriations, conduct a data-driven needs assessment for the town or
224 region in which such partner serves. Such needs assessment may
225 include recommendations for the preferred distribution and allocation
226 of child care spaces within such partner's respective town or region, and,
227 subject to the office's approval, may include a data-driven methodology
228 to reassign child care spaces before the contract date has lapsed. Such
229 needs assessment shall be created by the office in collaboration with
230 communities and shall directly inform, among other things, the
231 assignment of child care spaces across a mixed-delivery system,
232 including, but not limited to, licensed family child care providers, group
233 child care homes, child care centers and license-exempt public schools.

234 (e) Each local or regional governance partner shall employ a staff
235 liaison to aid and support the local or regional governance partner in
236 implementing the provisions of this section. Each staff liaison shall
237 ensure (1) that partnerships are established and fostered among child
238 care providers, (2) that cooperation is maintained with the Office of
239 Early Childhood in monitoring and evaluating child care programs, (3)
240 that existing and potential resources and services available to children
241 and families are identified, (4) facilitation and coordination of efficient,

242 data-driven, delivery of services to children and families, including (A)
243 referral procedures, and (B) before and after school child care for
244 children attending school day, school year programs, (5) the exchange
245 of information with other community organizations serving the needs
246 of children and families, (6) that recommendations are made to school
247 officials concerning transition from child care programs to preschool
248 programs and kindergarten, (7) that effective community engagement
249 strategies are employed to ensure diverse participation, (8) that
250 biannual child assessments, approved by the office, are performed at
251 programs, and conducted in partnership with families, and (9)
252 collaboration with the office related to planning improvements to the
253 state early care and education governance structure.

254 (f) The office shall monitor each local or regional governance partner
255 to ensure compliance with the provisions of this section.

256 Sec. 9. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) As part of Early Start CT, the
257 Commissioner of Early Childhood shall establish a state-funded
258 competitive program in which contracts are entered into with nonprofit
259 agencies and local and regional boards of education, which are federal
260 Head Start grantees, to assist in (1) establishing extended-day and full-
261 day, year-round, Head Start programs or expanding existing Head Start
262 programs to extended-day or full-day, year-round programs, (2)
263 enhancing program quality, (3) increasing the number of children
264 served in programs that are both a Head Start program and Early Head
265 Start grantee or delegate, (4) increasing the number of Early Head Start
266 children served above those who are federally funded, and (5)
267 increasing the hours for children currently receiving Early Head Start
268 services. Nonprofit agencies or boards of education seeking contracts
269 pursuant to this section shall make application to the commissioner on
270 such forms and at such times as the commissioner shall prescribe. The
271 commissioner shall include contract provisions that mandate at least
272 twenty-five per cent of the funding for such contracts shall be for the
273 purpose of enhancing program quality. All contracts entered into under
274 this section shall be funded within the limits of available appropriations
275 or otherwise from federal funds and private donations. All Head Start

276 programs funded pursuant to this section shall be in compliance with
277 federal Head Start performance standards.

278 (b) The commissioner may adopt regulations, in accordance with the
279 provisions of chapter 54 of the general statutes, for purposes of this
280 section.

281 Sec. 10. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) Notwithstanding the provisions
282 of sections 4-98, 4-212 to 4-219, inclusive, 4a-51 and 4a-57 of the general
283 statutes, the Commissioner of Early Childhood may, within available
284 appropriations, allocate funds to regional educational service centers for
285 the provision of professional development services, technical assistance
286 and evaluation and program planning and implementation activities,
287 local and regional boards of education, child care centers, group child
288 care homes and family child care homes, as such terms are described in
289 section 19a-77 of the general statutes, and other early childhood care and
290 education entities, as determined by the commissioner. Any funds
291 allocated by the commissioner under this section shall be expended in
292 accordance with procedures and conditions prescribed by the
293 commissioner.

294 Sec. 11. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2024*) For the fiscal years ending June
295 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, the office may pay, in an individual contract
296 entered into under sections 8-210 of the general statutes, as amended by
297 this act, and 10-16p of the general statutes, or a grant awarded pursuant
298 to section 10-16n of the general statutes, as amended by this act, a per-
299 child rate, or an equivalent per-classroom rate, that has been determined
300 by the commissioner. The per-child cost paid by the office under this
301 section for each eligible child enrolled in a program who is three or four
302 years of age and each child who is five years of age and not eligible to
303 enroll in school, pursuant to section 10-15c of the general statutes, shall
304 be at least ten thousand five hundred dollars for each such child, or paid
305 at an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for eighteen children.
306 For each eligible child who is under the age of three and enrolled in an
307 infant or toddler classroom and not in a preschool classroom, the per-
308 child cost paid by the office shall be at least thirteen thousand five

309 hundred dollars for each such child, or paid at an equivalent rate and
310 amount per classroom of eight children. The office shall use data-driven,
311 outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full
312 enrollment.

313 Sec. 12. Subsection (b) of section 8-210 of the 2024 supplement to the
314 general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu
315 thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

316 (b) The state, acting by and in the discretion of the Commissioner of
317 Early Childhood, may enter into a contract with a municipality, a group
318 child care home or family child care home, as described in section 19a-
319 77, a human resource development agency or a nonprofit corporation
320 for state financial assistance in developing and operating child care
321 centers, group child care homes and family child care homes for
322 children disadvantaged by reasons of economic, social or environmental
323 conditions, provided no such financial assistance shall be available for
324 the operating costs of any such child care center, group child care home
325 or family child care home unless it has been licensed by the
326 Commissioner of Early Childhood pursuant to section 19a-80. Such
327 financial assistance shall be available for a program of a municipality, of
328 a group child care home or family child care home, of a human resource
329 development agency or of a nonprofit corporation which may provide
330 for personnel, equipment, supplies, activities, program materials and
331 renovation and remodeling of the physical facilities of such child care
332 centers, group child care homes or family child care homes. Such
333 contract shall provide for state financial assistance, within available
334 appropriations, in the form of a state grant-in-aid (1) for a portion of the
335 cost of such program, as determined by the Commissioner of Early
336 Childhood, if not federally assisted, (2) equal to one-half of the amount
337 by which the net cost of such program, as approved by the
338 Commissioner of Early Childhood, exceeds the federal grant-in-aid
339 thereof, or (3) (A) for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, in an amount
340 not less than [(A)] (i) the per child cost as described in subdivision (1) of
341 subsection (b) of section 10-16q, as amended by this act, for each child
342 in such program that is three or four years of age and each child that is

343 five years of age who is not eligible to enroll in school, pursuant to
344 section 10-15c, while maintaining services to children under three years
345 of age under this section, and [(B)] (ii) thirteen thousand five hundred
346 dollars for each child three years of age or under who is in infant or
347 toddler care and not in a preschool program, and (B) for the fiscal years
348 ending June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, in accordance with the
349 provisions of section 11 of this act. Any such contract entered into on or
350 after July 1, 2022, shall include a provision that at least sixty per cent of
351 the children enrolled in such child care center, group child care home or
352 family child care home are members of families who are at or below
353 seventy-five per cent of the state median income. The Commissioner of
354 Early Childhood may authorize child care centers, group child care
355 homes and family child care homes receiving financial assistance under
356 this subsection to apply a program surplus to the next program year.
357 The Commissioner of Early Childhood shall consult with directors of
358 child care centers in establishing fees for the operation of such centers.
359 For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, the Commissioner of Early
360 Childhood shall, within available appropriations, enter into contracts
361 under this section for the purpose of expanding the number of spaces
362 available to children three years of age or under who are in infant or
363 toddler care and not in a preschool program.

364 Sec. 13. Subdivision (1) of subsection (b) of section 10-16q of the 2024
365 supplement to the general statutes is repealed and the following is
366 substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

367 (b) (1) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, the per child cost of
368 the Office of Early Childhood school readiness program offered by a
369 school readiness provider shall not exceed eight thousand nine hundred
370 twenty-seven dollars. For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2021, to June
371 30, 2024, inclusive, the per child cost of the Office of Early Childhood
372 school readiness program offered by a school readiness provider shall
373 not exceed nine thousand twenty-seven dollars. For the fiscal [year]
374 years ending June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, the per child cost of the
375 Office of Early Childhood full-time school readiness program offered by
376 a school readiness provider shall [not exceed ten thousand five hundred

377 dollars] be in accordance with the provisions of section 11 of this act.

378 Sec. 14. Subsection (b) of section 10-16n of the general statutes is
379 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1,*
380 *2024*):

381 (b) The Office of Early Childhood shall annually allocate to each town
382 in which the number of children under the temporary family assistance
383 program, as defined in subdivision (17) of section 10-262f, equals or
384 exceeds nine hundred children, (1) determined for the fiscal [year] years
385 ending June 30, 1996, to June 30, 2024, inclusive, an amount equal to one
386 hundred fifty thousand dollars plus eight and one-half dollars for each
387 child under the temporary family assistance program, provided such
388 amount may be reduced proportionately so that the total amount
389 awarded pursuant to this subsection does not exceed two million seven
390 hundred thousand dollars, and (2) for the fiscal years ending June 30,
391 2025, and June 30, 2026, an amount determined in accordance with the
392 provisions of section 11 of this act. The office shall award grants to the
393 local and regional boards of education for such towns and nonprofit
394 agencies located in such towns which meet the criteria established
395 pursuant to subsection (a) of this section to maintain the programs
396 established or expanded with funds provided pursuant to this
397 subsection in the fiscal years ending June 30, 1996, and June 30, 1997.
398 Any funds remaining in the allocation to such a town after grants are so
399 awarded shall be used to increase allocations to other such towns. Any
400 funds remaining after grants are so awarded to boards of education and
401 nonprofit agencies in all such towns shall be available to local and
402 regional boards of education and nonprofit agencies in other towns in
403 the state for grants for such purposes.

404 Sec. 15. Subsection (l) of section 19a-87b of the 2024 supplement to the
405 general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu
406 thereof (*Effective July 1, 2024*):

407 (l) For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2022, to June 30, [2026] 2028,
408 inclusive, the Commissioner of Early Childhood may issue a license to
409 maintain a family child care home in New Britain, New Haven,

410 Bridgeport, Stamford, Hartford, Danbury, [or] Waterbury or a town in
 411 New London County in accordance with the provisions of this chapter
 412 to a person or group of persons who have partnered with an association,
 413 organization, corporation, institution or agency, public or private, to
 414 provide child care services in a space provided by such association,
 415 organization, corporation, institution or agency, provided such space
 416 has been approved by the commissioner and is not in a private family
 417 home. The commissioner shall not approve more than one facility in
 418 each such city to be used for licenses issued under this subsection. An
 419 application for a license under this subsection shall include a copy of the
 420 current fire marshal certificate of compliance with the Fire Safety Code,
 421 and written verification of compliance with the State Building Code,
 422 local zoning and building requirements and local health ordinances. The
 423 commissioner may require an applicant for a license under this
 424 subsection to comply with additional conditions relating to the health
 425 and safety of the children who will be served in such facility. The
 426 commissioner may waive any requirement that does not apply to such
 427 facility. Any license issued under this subsection shall expire on June 30,
 428 2026, except that the commissioner may suspend or revoke any such
 429 license at any time in accordance with the provisions of section 19a-87e.

430 Sec. 16. Sections 8-210, 10-16n to 10-16r, inclusive, 10-16t, 10-16u, 10-
 431 16aa, 10-520b, 17b-749a and 17b-749d of the general statutes are
 432 repealed. (*Effective July 1, 2026*)

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 2	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 3	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 4	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 5	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 6	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 7	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 8	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 9	July 1, 2026	New section
Sec. 10	July 1, 2026	New section

Sec. 11	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	New section
Sec. 12	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	8-210(b)
Sec. 13	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	10-16q(b)(1)
Sec. 14	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	10-16n(b)
Sec. 15	<i>July 1, 2024</i>	19a-87b(l)
Sec. 16	<i>July 1, 2026</i>	Repealer section

Statement of Legislative Commissioners:

In Sections 5 and 8, references to "local governance partner" were changed to "local or regional governance partner" for consistency.

ED *Joint Favorable C/R*

APP

APP *Joint Favorable Subst.*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact: See Below

Municipal Impact: See Below

Explanation

The bill results in a fiscal impact to the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and various municipalities beginning in FY 27, as described below.

Section 2 results in a cost to OEC beginning in FY 27 of approximately \$3.8 million to administer and operate the Early Start CT program, which includes establishing as many as 14 new Local Governance Partners in communities where there are no existing School Readiness Councils.

Section 8 results in a cost to municipalities beginning in FY 27 associated with establishing local governance partners to assist in the provision of early care and education. The bill requires each local governance partner to conduct a data-driven needs assessment and to hire a staff liaison to assist in implementing the provisions of this section.

Section 10 results in a potential cost to OEC beginning in FY 27 to the extent they allocate funds to regional educational service centers, which results in a corresponding revenue gain to towns. This funding can be used for the provision of professional development services, technical assistance, and evaluation and program planning and implementation activities as well as boards of education and childcare centers and homes.

The bill makes other technical and conforming changes that have no fiscal impact.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation.

OLR Bill Analysis**sHB 5051****AN ACT ESTABLISHING EARLY START CT.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

§§ 1 & 2 — PURPOSE OF EARLY START CT

Makes OEC responsible for operating and administering a state-funded early care and education system to coordinate and facilitate efficient delivery of early childhood care (“Early Start CT”)

§ 3 — SLIDING FEE SCALE

Requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale for families participating in Early Start CT

§ 4 — POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Requires OEC to implement (1) policies and procedures necessary to administer Early Start CT, (2) infant and toddler and school-age ratios and group size requirements, and (3) head teacher staffing requirements; requires existing ratios, group size requirements, and staffing requirements to remain applicable until replaced by policies and procedures OEC implements while adopting regulations

§ 5 — FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Allows eligible entities to enter into a contract with OEC to receive state financial assistance to operate early childhood care and education programs; establishes eligibility requirements and allows the OEC commissioner to consider certain criteria when determining eligibility; requires any contract to be made contingent upon available funding and a successful application to an OEC-issued RFP; requires OEC to allocate a certain amount of funding for coordination, program evaluation, and administration; and creates per-child and per-classroom rates for assistance by age

§ 6 — UNEXPENDED FUNDS

Allows up to \$1 million in unexpended Early Start CT funds, beginning FY 26, to be used to (1) provide professional development for early childhood care and education program providers or (2) support early childhood education programs in satisfying staff qualification requirements

§ 7 — ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Generally requires any program participating in Early Start CT to be accredited or approved within three years of entering into an OEC contract

§ 8 — LOCAL GOVERNANCE PARTNERS

Requires local governance partners to represent each community receiving Early Start CT funds and the membership of each local governance partner to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the town or region it serves and to consist of early care and education stakeholders; requires each local governance partner to (1) conduct a data-

driven needs assessment for the town or region the partner serves and (2) employ a staff liaison

§ 9 — COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Requires the OEC commissioner to establish a state-funded competitive program in which contracts are entered into with federal Head Start grantees to improve and increase access to Early Head Start and Head Start programs

§ 10 — ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO RESCS

Allows the OEC commissioner to allocate funds to RESCs to provide (1) professional development services, (2) technical assistance and evaluation, and (3) program planning and implementation activities, and other entities

§§ 11 & 12 — CHILD CARE HOMES AND CENTERS FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

Maintains current per-child grant amounts in FY 24 for certain children and requires OEC to pay in an individual grant a per-child rate, or an equivalent per classroom rate, that the commissioner determines for FYs 25 and 26

§§ 13 & 14 — SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM PER CHILD COST LIMITATIONS

Extends the FY 25 cap on the per-child cost of OEC's school readiness program through FY 26; requires OEC's annual Head Start and Early Head Start grant allocations for FYs 25 and 26 to be in an amount determined under the per-child cost OEC is required to pay under § 11 of the bill

§ 15 — FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME LICENSE EXPANSION

Allows the OEC commissioner to issue a license to maintain a family child care home to a town in New London County, and moves out the expiration date for all of the licenses the OEC commissioner issued under the family child care home license expansion from June 30, 2026, to June 30, 2028

§ 16 — REPEALER

Repeals various sections related to school readiness programs in light of the bill establishing Early Start CT

BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

This bill makes the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) responsible for operating and administering a state-funded early care and education system to coordinate and facilitate efficient delivery of early childhood care ("Early Start CT") and establishes policies and procedures for program operation and administration. It also makes related minor, technical, and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, unless otherwise noted below.

§§ 1 & 2 — PURPOSE OF EARLY START CT

Makes OEC responsible for operating and administering a state-funded early care and education system to coordinate and facilitate efficient delivery of early childhood care (“Early Start CT”)

The bill makes OEC responsible for operating and administering a state-funded early care and education system to coordinate and facilitate efficient delivery of early childhood care (“Early Start CT”) to (1) provide open access for infants and toddlers and pre-school age children to high quality programs that promote the health and safety of children and prepare them for school, and (2) prevent or minimize the potential for developmental delay in children before age five.

The bill also requires OEC to operate Early Start CT to facilitate the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the children, families, and staff in Early Start CT programs.

Service Coordination

Under the bill, Early Start CT must encourage coordination and cooperation among programs and prevent the duplication of services and recognize the specific service needs and unique resources available to particular municipalities. The office must also improve the availability and quality of Early Start CT programs and their coordination with the services of child care providers.

Impact on Families

The bill requires Early Start CT to provide opportunities for parents to choose among affordable, accredited (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children or National Association for Family Child Care), and Head Start approved programs and strengthen families through encouragement of family engagement and partnership in a child’s development and education.

Under the bill, Early Start CT must also enhance a family’s capacity to meet the special needs of the children, including children with disabilities. It also must assure that children with disabilities are integrated into programs available to children who do not have disabilities.

Funding

The bill requires Early Start CT to maximize local and federal early childhood education funding to expand capacity and access, and to reduce educational costs by decreasing the need for special education services for school-age children.

§ 3 — SLIDING FEE SCALE

Requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale for families participating in Early Start CT

The bill requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale for families participating in Early Start CT. The fee scale must be based on family income and align with the existing Care 4 Kids sliding fee scale.

§ 4 — POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Requires OEC to implement (1) policies and procedures necessary to administer Early Start CT, (2) infant and toddler and school-age ratios and group size requirements, and (3) head teacher staffing requirements; requires existing ratios, group size requirements, and staffing requirements to remain applicable until replaced by policies and procedures OEC implements while adopting regulations

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to implement (1) policies and procedures necessary to administer the bill's provisions, (2) infant and toddler and school-age ratios and group size requirements, and (3) head teacher staffing requirements for programs serving only school-age children, while in the process of adopting these policies and procedures in regulations.

Under the bill, any existing regulations relating to infant and toddler and school-age ratios, group size requirements, and head teacher staffing requirements for programs serving only school-age children that are generally applicable to child care centers and group child care homes must remain applicable until replaced by the policies and procedures this section describes.

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to post notice of the intent to adopt regulations on OEC's website and the eRegulations System within 20 days after implementing them. The policies and procedures are valid until regulations are adopted.

§ 5 — FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Allows eligible entities to enter into a contract with OEC to receive state financial assistance to operate early childhood care and education programs; establishes eligibility requirements and allows the OEC commissioner to consider certain criteria when determining eligibility; requires any contract to be made contingent upon available funding and a successful application to an OEC-issued RFP; requires OEC to allocate a certain amount of funding for coordination, program evaluation, and administration; and creates per-child and per-classroom rates for assistance by age

Eligibility Requirements

The bill allows the following eligible entities to enter into a contract with OEC to receive state financial assistance: municipalities, local and regional boards of education, regional education service centers (RESCs), family resource centers, Head Start programs, preschool programs, nonprofit organizations, child care centers, group or family child care homes, and any other program that meets the commissioner's standards. The assistance is for operating early childhood care and education programs that focus on providing access to these programs based on economic, social, or environmental conditions, including in regions with insufficient access to child care.

Under the bill, to receive this financial assistance (1) a child care center or group or family child care home must be licensed by the OEC commissioner and (2) a local or regional board of education or RESC must be approved by the state Department of Education.

Under the bill, at least 60% of eligible children participating in Early Start CT and enrolled in a child care center or group or family child care home must be members of a family that is at or below 75% of the state median income.

The bill requires the majority of programs eligible for the financial assistance to serve children that reside in, or attend programs located in, priority school districts, former priority school districts, or towns with schools deemed severe need schools because 40% or more of the lunches served are served to students eligible for free or reduced priced lunches.

The bill allows the OEC commissioner, when determining eligibility for financial assistance, to consider (1) a community's Care 4 Kids participation and (2) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's

(CDC) social vulnerability index as the census tract determines. The index may include a review of a community's indices of social, economic, racial, housing, transportation, and household characteristics as the CDC determines.

Request for Proposals (RFP)

The bill requires any contract to be made contingent upon available funding and a successful application to an OEC-issued RFP informed by the appropriate local governance partner's needs assessment and community plan (see § 8). The bill exempts from the RFP requirement any Early Start CT facility that has (1) been approved to operate a child care program financed through the Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority (CHEFA) and (2) received a commitment for debt service from the Department of Social Services on or before June 30, 2014, and from OEC on or after July 1, 2014.

Funding for Program Administration and Operation

Under the bill, OEC must allocate an amount up to 5% of the total funding for each town or city or the participating towns or cities in the case of a regional application, but no more than \$75,000 per town or city for coordination, program evaluation, and administration. The bill requires the allocated amount to be increased by an amount equal to local funding provided for early childhood education coordination, program evaluation, and administration, not to exceed \$25,000.

The bill prohibits any Early Start CT program that receives funds from discriminating based on ancestry; race; color; national origin; sex; gender identity or expression; sexual orientation; religion; learning, physical, intellectual, or mental disability; or any other protected class. It also prohibits funds received from being used to supplant federal, state, or local funding received for early childhood education on behalf of children in an early childhood education program.

The bill allows OEC to use up to 2% of funds allocated to the early care and education appropriation to evaluate program effectiveness and impact on participating children, families, and programs, including (1)

child outcomes, (2) later school performance, (3) quality standards, (4) professional development and preparation, and (5) parent engagement impact.

Per-Child and Per-Classroom Rate

The bill allows OEC to pay, in an individual contract for FY 27, a per-child rate or an equivalent per-classroom rate that the commissioner determines.

Under the bill, OEC must pay, for each eligible child enrolled in an Early Start CT program, a per-child cost of at least:

1. \$10,500 for each child aged three or four, or aged five and not eligible to enroll in school, or an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for 18 children; or
2. \$13,500 for each child under age three who is in toddler or infant care and not in a preschool program, or an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for eight children.

The bill requires OEC to use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full enrollment.

§ 6 — UNEXPENDED FUNDS

Allows up to \$1 million in unexpended Early Start CT funds, beginning FY 26, to be used to (1) provide professional development for early childhood care and education program providers or (2) support early childhood education programs in satisfying staff qualification requirements

The bill allows, for FY 26 and each fiscal year after, up to \$1 million in unexpended Early Start CT funds to be available for:

1. providing professional development for early childhood care and education program providers, and staff employed in these programs, as long as these programs accept state funds for infant, toddler, and preschool slots; and
2. supporting early childhood education programs in satisfying the staff qualification requirements, as long as these programs accept state funds.

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to determine how the unexpended funds are distributed.

Under the bill, with the consent of the Office of Policy and Management secretary, any unexpended funds that OEC does not distribute may be used for the following:

1. assisting programs in meeting and maintaining accreditation requirements;
2. providing training in implementing preschool assessments and curricula;
3. developing and implementing best practices for parents in supporting preschool and kindergarten student learning;
4. developing and implementing strategies for children to successfully transition to preschool and from preschool to kindergarten, including through parental engagement and whole-family supports that may be used through the two-generational initiative or other available resources; and
5. providing professional development.

§ 7 — ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Generally requires any program participating in Early Start CT to be accredited or approved within three years of entering into an OEC contract

The bill requires any program participating in Early Start CT to be accredited or Early Head Start or Head Start approved within three years of entering a contract with OEC. Under the bill, any program not accredited must have an approved program plan within 12 months of entering into a contract with OEC.

§ 8 — LOCAL GOVERNANCE PARTNERS

Requires local governance partners to represent each community receiving Early Start CT funds and the membership of each local governance partner to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the town or region it serves and to consist of early care and education stakeholders; requires each local governance partner to (1) conduct a data-driven needs assessment for the town or region the partner serves and (2) employ a staff liaison

The bill requires local governance partners be established, within available appropriations, to assist in providing early care and education in a community under Early Start CT. The bill allows two or more towns or school districts and appropriate representatives of groups or entities interested in early childhood education in a region to establish a regional governance partner. It requires OEC to monitor each local or regional governance partner for compliance with the bill's provisions.

Membership

The bill requires the membership of each local or regional governance partner to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the town or region it serves. Membership must consist of early care and education stakeholders, including the following:

1. elected and appointed officials;
2. parents;
3. representatives with expertise in early childhood education;
4. a Smart Start representative, where applicable;
5. local education and healthcare providers in the community;
6. a local homeless education liaison;
7. community representatives from workforce or job training entities; and
8. other community representatives who provide services to children.

Role and Responsibilities

Under the bill, a local or regional governance partner must do the following:

1. conduct and administer a data-driven needs assessment for its respective community or region (see below),

2. employ strategies to solicit parental engagement and membership,
3. provide periodic technical assistance on best practices in early childhood and family engagement for its town or region,
4. jointly sponsor professional development opportunities with OEC, and
5. ensure that community outreach is regularly conducted and maintained with community stakeholders.

The bill also requires each local or regional governance partner to designate a staff person to be responsible for early childhood program coordination, program evaluation, and administration and to act as a liaison between participating towns and the commissioner.

Data-Driven Needs Assessment

The bill requires each local or regional governance partner, within available appropriations, to conduct a data-driven needs assessment for the town or region the partner serves. The needs assessment must include recommendations for the preferred distribution and allocation of child care spaces in the partner's respective town or region, and subject to OEC's approval, may include a data-driven methodology to reassign child care spaces before the contract date lapses.

Under the bill, OEC must create the needs assessment in collaboration with communities. The assessment must directly inform, among other things, child care space assignment across a mixed delivery system, including licensed family child care providers, group child care homes, child care centers, and license-exempt public schools.

Staff Liaison

The bill requires each local or regional governance partner to hire a staff liaison to aid and support the partner in implementing this section's provisions and ensure collaboration with OEC related to planning improvements to the state early care and education

governance structure. The staff liaison must also ensure that:

1. partnerships are established and fostered among child care providers,
2. cooperation is maintained with OEC in monitoring and evaluating child care programs,
3. existing and potential resources and services available to children are identified,
4. recommendations are made to school officials about transition from child care programs to preschool programs and kindergarten,
5. effective community engagement strategies are used to ensure diverse participation, and
6. biannual child assessments OEC approves are performed at programs and done in partnership with families.

The staff liaison must also ensure (1) an information exchange with other community organization serving children's and families' needs and (2) facilitation and coordination of efficient, data-driven delivery of services to children and families, including referral procedures and before and after school child care for children attending school day and school year programs.

§ 9 — COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Requires the OEC commissioner to establish a state-funded competitive program in which contracts are entered into with federal Head Start grantees to improve and increase access to Early Head Start and Head Start programs

The bill requires the OEC commissioner, as part of Early Start CT, to establish a state-funded competitive grant program for nonprofit agencies and local and regional boards of education that are federal Head Start grantees, to assist with enhancing program quality and increasing the:

1. number of children served in programs that are both a Head Start

- program and Early Head Start grantee or delegate,
2. number of Early Head Start children served above those who are federally funded, and
 3. hours for children currently receiving Early Head Start services.

Additionally, it requires the grant program to assist with establishing extended-day and full-day, year-round, Head Start programs or expanding existing Head Start programs to extended-day or full-day, year round programs.

Under the bill, nonprofit agencies or boards of education seeking grants must apply to the commissioner on forms and at times the commissioner prescribes. The bill allows the commissioner to adopt regulations to establish the grant program.

The bill requires the commissioner to include contract provisions requiring at least 25% of funding to be used to enhance program quality. Contracts must be funded within available appropriations, or from federal funds and private donations, and all Head Start programs funded under the bill must comply with federal Head Start performance standards.

§ 10 — ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO RESCS

Allows the OEC commissioner to allocate funds to RESCs to provide (1) professional development services, (2) technical assistance and evaluation, and (3) program planning and implementation activities, and other entities

The bill authorizes the OEC commissioner, within available appropriations, to allocate funds to RESCs to provide professional development services, technical assistance and evaluation, and program planning and implementation activities; local and regional boards of education; child care centers; group and family child care homes; and other early childhood care and education entities as the commissioner determines.

Under the bill, any funds the commissioner allocates must be spent according to procedures and conditions the commissioner sets.

§§ 11 & 12 — CHILD CARE HOMES AND CENTERS FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

Maintains current per-child grant amounts in FY 24 for certain children and requires OEC to pay in an individual grant a per-child rate, or an equivalent per classroom rate, that the commissioner determines for FYs 25 and 26

By law, the state, through the OEC commissioner, may enter into contracts that provide state financial assistance (i.e., grants) to municipalities, human resource development agencies, nonprofit corporations, or group or family child care homes for developing and operating child care homes or centers for disadvantaged children. Existing law requires that these contracts with the state provide for a grant, within available appropriations, for an amount at least equal to the per child cost set in state law for each child aged three to five not yet eligible to enroll in school.

The bill maintains the above-described grant through the end of FY 24, and requires OEC, for FYs 25 and 26, to pay in an individual contract or a grant, a per-child rate, or an equivalent per-classroom rate, in an amount the commissioner determines.

Under the bill, the per-child cost must be at least:

1. \$10,500 for each child aged three or four, or aged five and not eligible to enroll in school, or an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for 18 children; or
2. \$13,500 for each child under age three who is in toddler or infant care and not in a preschool program, or an equivalent rate and amount per classroom for eight children.

The bill requires OEC to use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full enrollment.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§§ 13 & 14 — SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM PER CHILD COST LIMITATIONS

Extends the FY 25 cap on the per-child cost of OEC's school readiness program through FY 26; requires OEC's annual Head Start and Early Head Start grant allocations for FYs

25 and 26 to be in an amount determined under the per-child cost OEC is required to pay under § 11 of the bill

The bill extends the FY 25 cap on the per-child cost (i.e., \$10,500) of OEC's school readiness program through FY 26, and the bill requires the cap to be in accordance with the per-child cost OEC is required to pay under § 11 of the bill.

Current law requires OEC to annually allocate \$150,000 plus \$8.50 for each child to each town that has at least 900 children receiving temporary family assistance for Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The bill replaces this allocation for FYs 2025 and 2026 with an allocation to be in an amount determined in accordance with the per-child cost OEC is required to pay under § 11 of the bill.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 15 — FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME LICENSE EXPANSION

Allows the OEC commissioner to issue a license to maintain a family child care home to a town in New London County, and moves out the expiration date for all of the licenses the OEC commissioner issued under the family child care home license expansion from June 30, 2026, to June 30, 2028

Under current law, the OEC commissioner may issue family child care home licenses in seven specified municipalities to a person or group of people, in a partnership with an association, organization, corporation, institution, or public or private agency, to provide child care services in a commissioner-approved space outside of a family home. These licenses must be issued following existing law.

The bill also allows the commissioner to issue these licenses for a town in New London County, and appears to move out the expiration date for all of these licenses by two years from June 30, 2026, to June 30, 2028. (However, the bill also retains a requirement that the licenses expire on June 30, 2026.)

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 16 — REPEALER

Repeals various sections related to school readiness programs in light of the bill establishing Early Start CT

The bill makes conforming changes by repealing several early childhood statutes that relate to the following:

1. state grants for planning, constructing, renovating, developing, and operating licensed child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes (CGS § 8-210);
2. various school readiness provisions, including (a) OEC's Head Start and Early Head Start competitive grant program, (b) state financial assistance and eligibility for funding school readiness programs, and (c) school readiness program requirements, including per child cost limitations and sliding fee scale requirements (CGS §§ 10-16n to 10-16r);
3. participation by five-year-old children in school readiness programs (CGS § 10-16t);
4. school readiness program grants in transitional school districts (CGS § 10-16u);
5. the competitive district grant account (CGS § 10-16aa);
6. early childhood teacher credentialing (CGS § 10-520b);
7. school readiness provider grants (CGS § 17b-749a); and
8. licensed child care center sliding fee scales (CGS § 17b-749d).

BACKGROUND

Related Bills

sSB 286, favorably reported by the Education Committee, has a substantially similar provision allowing the OEC commissioner to issue a family child care home license to a town in New London County. The bill also prohibits the commissioner from issuing more than 20 licenses under the family child care license expansion, eliminates the license expiration date of June 30, 2026, and requires licenses to be issued for four-year terms.

sSB 249, favorably reported by the Commerce Committee, prohibits the OEC commissioner from issuing more than 20 licenses under the family child care license expansion, and eliminates the license expiration date of June 30, 2026.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Change of Reference - APP
Yea 45 Nay 0 (03/06/2024)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute
Yea 52 Nay 0 (04/04/2024)