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**Governance**

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*Testimony of*

**Kate Dias & Joslyn DeLancey**  
**Connecticut Education Association**

*Before the*  
**Education Committee**

*Re:*

**HB 5051 AN ACT ESTABLISHING EARLY START CONNECTICUT**

February 21, 2024

As the Blue Ribbon Report on Child Care makes clear, access to affordable, flexible, and dependable care for pre-school children has never been more challenging nor more necessary than before. Conventional work hours are not what they were. Making ends meet requires two parents to work, leaving less time for parenting. And in the growing number of single-parent households, one job is often not enough.

At the same time, developmentally inappropriate demands on our public school children have pushed academic rigor into kindergarten and pre-school settings increasing stress and anxiety among our youngest students. Too many children are sent to kindergarten as a daycare option resulting in poor schooling experiences for socially, emotionally, and developmentally unready children. The detrimental effects on their educational development sustain throughout their K-12 experience. This is why your commitment to bring Connecticut in line with the vast majority of other states that require children entering kindergarten to be age 5 by September is so important.

The ability of children to succeed from kindergarten onward is dependent on their ability to start kindergarten developmentally ready. Ensuring children and their families have access to a diverse range of early childhood programs that can meet their needs is key.

Yet, we know that early childhood options for parents are fragmented, and Connecticut has been slow to join the growing number of states moving toward universal pre-school. Simply put, we do not have a system of early childhood care. Yet for so many reasons – ranging from children’s

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social and emotional development, and their school readiness, to the economic needs for the state, business, and workers – a system of suitable childcare options is what we need.

We commend Governor Lamont, Commissioner Bye, and Education Committee members for breaking new ground toward building an early childhood system. We appreciate your focus on supporting and uplifting our Early Childhood programs across the state. We appreciate creative efforts to enhance the pipeline of early childhood educators and support staff and their pathways to professional growth. Growing the number of certified early educators is critical to ensuring high quality experiences for children and fulfilling experiences to retain educators.

It goes without saying that more investment in early childhood education is necessary to ensure that children are developmentally ready to enter kindergarten at age 5 and succeed in school in the years that follow. And we appreciate commitments made to enhance funding that reaches students in our public K-12 system, and for such commitments being carried through as well.

As the legislature considers proposals to enhance our early childhood and K-12 systems, we urge you to focus on

- Attracting well-prepared early childhood educators,
- Supporting age and developmentally appropriate curricula that include play
- Expanding access toward a system of universal pre-kindergarten
- Enhancing the state's commitment to early childhood and K-12 education for all.

Thank you for your time and commitment to children across the state.

