

**Testimony of Elena Trueworthy, Acting Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood
Before the Committee on Children
S.B. 1369 – An Act Concerning Child Care Support for Connecticut’s Workforce
H.B. 7044 – An Act Concerning the Creation of the Early Care and Education Portal
Thursday, February 27, 2025**

Good morning, Senator Maher, Representative Paris, Senator Martin, Representative Dauphinais and distinguished members of the Committee on Children. I am Elena Trueworthy, Acting Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am testifying concerning **S.B. 1369 – An Act Concerning Child Care Support for Connecticut’s Workforce** and **H.B. 7044 – An Act Concerning the Creation of the Early Care and Education Portal**.

The OEC understands the intent and aspiration of most provisions in **S.B. 1369 – An Act Concerning Child Care Support for Connecticut’s Workforce**. The goals of the Workforce Child Care Program and Fund, administered by a Workforce Child Care Board, within the Office of Early Childhood for administrative purposes only, has many of the same goals of as the elements of the Blue Ribbon Panel roadmap and the Governor’s Universal Preschool Endowment fund.

OEC supports the Governor’s Universal Preschool Endowment fund as the appropriate vehicle to strengthen Connecticut’s early care and education system, making it more accessible and affordable for families, and provide more preschool opportunities for our children. OEC does not support the Workforce Child Care Fund, as proposed in the bill, and opposes a 1.5% payroll tax on employer payroll expense as a revenue source.

OEC believes that improving wages for children care workforce is critical to improve the quality of programs and pay professionals what they deserve. The Blue Ribbon Panel recommendation is to enhance salaries through improved rates as reflected in the Governor’s recommended budget. OEC believes this comprehensive approach with sustainable funding that increases rates, invests in quality improvement, workforce development, and programs is critical. Connecticut’s current early childhood non-system is a result of decades of well-intentioned new initiatives and ideas that do not easily meld into a cohesive approach that maximizes the benefit to children and families.

We believe the strategy of rate increases for providers within OEC’s purview is a more sustainable and systematic approach and takes the OEC and State of Connecticut out of the role of developing special grant programs to child care staff directly. Moreover, OEC does not have the available budget allocation to extend such funding to the entire field. This proposal to compensate all child care providers across the state would incur a significant fiscal cost to the state.

The OEC understands that scholarships and professional development are critical supports for the early care and education field. The OEC currently offers professional development opportunities that are free, low-cost, and available in different formats and languages to meet the varying needs of the workforce. In FY24, OEC provided \$1,429,630 in scholarships to help pay for the attainment of Child Development Credential (CDA), or Associate's, or Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, and specific stand-alone courses to help meet required qualifications. All scholarship recipients must be directly and currently working with children ages birth to preschool located in one of the following settings: licensed family child care homes, centers or group homes, and OEC-funded license exempt centers and school-based programs. OEC currently works within budgeted state and federal funding to maximize opportunities available for the workforce.

Child care is more expensive to provide than most families can afford. In January 2025 OEC implemented policy that no family, who participates in Care 4 Kids, pays more than 7% of their household income for child care. This was a significant step forward in making child care more affordable for Connecticut's lower and moderate-income families. OEC will work over time to align the state-funded parent fee schedule with that of Care 4 Kids to allow for greater affordability and access for families.

The Governor's Universal Preschool Endowment will provide a long-term investment in early care and education to ensure that children and families have access to affordable preschool for years to come. It is a prudent and smart strategy to invest a portion of funds now with the long view to build up and sustain funds for the future.

The Office of Early Childhood supports, while acknowledging this bears a fiscal cost, **H.B. 7044 – An Act Concerning the Creation of the Early Care and Education Portal**. The Blue Ribbon Panel indicated that there is a need to simplify Connecticut's early care and education system specifically citing, "By eliminating silos, modernizing state systems, and being responsive to stakeholders across the system, the Panel believes Connecticut can improve its service to children, families, and providers."

A portal supports the report's third goal: "Develop an agile, flexible, and responsive ECE system that maximizes current resources and supports economically viable programs." Specifically, goals 3B and 3D speak to the need to simplify the way families access and understand the many early childhood options that are available to them and allowing the OEC to track demands and usage across the state.

Objective 3B: Maximize existing resources by strengthening partnerships to identify opportunities for alignment and innovation and reduce administrative burdens and barriers to accessing state systems.

Objective 3D: Develop data and information systems to track and improve systems and outcomes, in coordination with other statewide efforts.

The portal would establish a “one point of entry” single online platform or website where families can search and compare child care options across a specific region, serving as a centralized hub to access various child care providers. Improving how families access and obtain care that meets their needs will increase the usage of available child care. The creation of the “one point of entry” portal will provide aggregate data that is currently not available statewide. The OEC will learn about the real-time needs of families and communities and enable the agency to react to demand.

The “one point of entry” portal will also benefit providers who utilize a Child Care Management System (CCMS). CCMS platforms allow child care providers to streamline and organize many of their daily business practices in one responsive system that can communicate with other state systems. A “one point of entry” portal for providers would allow the exchange of enrollment data through a CCMS which could then communicate with many of the existing OEC secure data systems: IMPACT, ECE Reporter, and the Provider 360 Portal to connect and ease reporting and data entry actions required by state-funded programs. In sum, providers would enter their information into one system rather than several. Use of a CCMS would also benefit non-state funded providers as it would improve their business efficiency.

It’s important to note that this portal will incur significant IT, operational, and licensing investment in state funds.

Thank you for your time and attention. The OEC is committed to working together—with legislators, the executive branch, providers, advocates, and parents—to better serve our families with young children.

The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood advances a two-generation family-centered approach in our pursuit of optimal health, safety, and learning outcomes for young children. Through our core programs, we support infant and toddler care, preschool, after-school care, child care and youth camp licensing, home visiting, and early intervention to address developmental delays. OEC is working toward better-coordinated, cost-effective services that support Connecticut’s youngest children and families.