

**Testimony of Elena Trueworthy, Acting Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood**  
**Before the Education Committee**  
**H.B. 6867 - An Act Creating the Universal Preschool Endowment**  
**H.B. 6866 - An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Education**  
**Wednesday, February 19, 2025**

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Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus and distinguished members of the Education Committee. I am Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). I am here today to testify in support of **H.B. 6867 – An Act Creating the Universal Preschool Endowment** and **H.B. 6866 – An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations for Education**.

**H.B. 6867** establishes a Universal Preschool Endowment, the largest expansion of preschool access in Connecticut history, enabling thousands of additional children to enroll in high-quality, early childhood education services, which have been unattainable for many families. This investment builds on the recommendations of the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care, which brought together voices from across the industry, parents, businesses, and government, to provide a strategic roadmap to guide ongoing investments in child care and early education.

The Governor’s proposal will deposit a portion of the state’s anticipated surpluses over the next several years into the Universal Preschool Endowment. The endowment will be seeded by up to \$300 million from the FY25 surplus, and in the following years any unappropriated surpluses from the General Fund will be transferred into the endowment. The Office of the Treasurer will manage the funds, and the OEC Commissioner, in consultation with SDE, may expend up to 10% of the balance of the endowment in any fiscal year. In the first year, the OEC may expend up to \$30 million.

The Universal Preschool Endowment aims to expand affordable and accessible preschool options for families by:

- Making preschool options available at no cost to families earning up to \$100,000 per year;
- Limiting the cost-share for families earning between \$100,000 per year and \$150,000 per year to a maximum of \$20 per day;
- Creating 20,000 new and expanded day preschool spaces by 2032;
- Reducing the cost to families for approximately 19,000 existing preschool spaces;
- Building on a “mixed-delivery system” to allow for parent choice, which includes licensed child care centers, group child care homes, family child care homes, and public schools.
- Addressing program challenges faced by families with preschoolers with special education needs;
- Prioritizing community planning and decision making that is fair and data driven;
- Continuing commitment to common quality standards and ongoing quality improvement;

- Strengthening the whole birth through 5 early childhood system by providing funding to assure parity and stability for infant and toddler care while expanding preschool; and
- Being simple, easy to access, and flexible to meet family needs.

This is a historic step forward for Connecticut's children, families, child care providers, the early care and education system, businesses, and the economy. We urge the Education Committee to embrace this vision and the establishment of Connecticut's Universal Preschool Endowment.

There are three sections in **H.B. 6866 – An Act Implementing the Governor's Recommendations for Education** that fall under the purview of our agency.

**Section 17** removes statutory language authorizing the OEC commissioner to allocate a \$200 General Administrative Payment (GAP) to Birth to Three providers for each child with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) whose plan accounts for less than nine hours of service a month, provided at least one service is provided by the provider a month. The implementation of a tiered Medicaid rate system will help fiscally stabilize the Birth to Three system, support best practices in service delivery, pay staff based on credentials, and help to recruit and retain the workforce. The OEC does plan to continue the GAP payment through administrative action in an amount determined necessary and reasonable by the OEC Commissioner.

**Section 19** gives the OEC Commissioner the discretion and authority to allocate funds, within available appropriations, to Head Start on Housing consistent with the objectives of the State Head Start grant program. This language allows the OEC to continue the innovative Head Start on Housing program with a modest investment, a first-of-its-kind initiative in Connecticut and the nation that identifies young children who are enrolled in Head Start and whose families are experiencing homelessness and connects them with permanent housing support.

Launched in 2022, the program is jointly administered by the Connecticut Department of Housing and the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, and it leverages existing support from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's voucher program to connect these families with housing. Head Start is a program that provides low-income families with young children access to free services centered around early learning and development, health, and family well-being.

**Section 20** removes the statute that places the OEC within the State Department of Education (SDE) for administrative purposes only. The OEC was established in statute in 2014 and since then, the agency has matured and increasing taken on duties originally administered by SDE, including fiscal functions. OEC will be taking over audit and payroll function as well.

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.

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*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.*