

**Testimony Regarding H.B. 5293:
An Act Extending the “Care4Kids” Program
to Families with a Parent Who is Actively Seeking Employment**
Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D.
Select Committee on Children
February 8, 2011

Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, an independent, research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut’s children, youth, and families.

Care4Kids is a crucial support for Connecticut’s children and working families. By subsidizing child care costs for low- to moderate-income families, it allows many of these families to obtain safe and affordable child care for their children that would otherwise be unavailable to them. On average, the cost of child care in Connecticut is \$10,165, or approximately 12.2% of the state’s median family income.¹ Given this high cost of care, it is essential that Care4Kids be available as a source of financial assistance for the everyday workers that drive Connecticut’s economy. The need is clear – during FY 2010, Care4Kids served an average of 6,223 infants and toddlers, 7,233 preschoolers, and 6,046 school-age children per month.²

Care4Kids is also a vital support for Connecticut’s youngest and poorest residents. Children whose caregivers have lower income, less education, and higher levels of stress in their lives begin to score lower on standardized tests as early as 18 months, and this “achievement gap” not only persists but typically expands as the children age.³ However, access to language-rich, nurturing, and responsive caregiving has been proven to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.⁴ Thus, Care4Kids not only supports our economy in the present, helping parents go to work, but also supports our economy in the future, preparing the next generation for success in school and beyond.

In theory, we support the expansion of Care4Kids by allowing parents who are actively seeking employment to enroll their children in the program. However, opening the program to these parents at this time, without including additional funding, would only increase the number of applications to Care4Kids, without increasing the number of slots available to children. The total number of children served would not increase unless funding was increased as well.

Before we can expand eligibility categories for Care4Kids, we *must* ensure that all funding appropriated by the legislature for Care4Kids is actually spent on this program. This year, the Department of Social Services (DSS) is projecting a total expenditure of \$94 million⁵ on the Care4Kids program, \$9.4 million *less* than the budget appropriated by the state legislature for State Fiscal Year 11.⁶ This “surplus” is not a result of lack of need, but rather a result of eligibility

restrictions imposed by DSS this past November. These restrictions rendered new applicants earning between 50 and 75% of the state median income ineligible for the Care4Kids program.⁷ Yet these families need assistance too. For a family of three (a single parent, one infant, and one preschooler) earning 75% of the state median income, the cost of full-time child care is equal to 38% of its annual income.⁸ No family could afford to devote such a large proportion of their budget to child care. We cannot understand why the Department of Social Services would choose to take assistance away from this family when the funding is there, and was put there, with all deliberate intent, by the legislature, nor can we understand how it has the unilateral authority to make this choice.

During this current fiscal crisis, we recognize that the costs associated with effectively expanding Care4Kids are likely too high to be reasonably expended at this time. As such, we recommend that the legislature instead focus on the creation of a coordinated, consolidated early care and education system for Connecticut. By consolidating funding streams, coordinating across early care and education programs, focusing on quality development, and improving data collection, both the quality and quantity of the state's early care and education programs can be increased. These changes would benefit all working families and their children who utilize early care and education programs.

We believe that the best method for creating this efficient and effective system would be to create a Department of Early Childhood with regulatory and financial control over early care and education programs, as proposed in S.B. 120. The creation of this separate department was also recommended in reports from the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement⁹ and the Children's Services Working Group of the Governor's Transition Team.¹⁰ **As the budget situation improves, Care4Kids could then be expanded within the constraints of this newly improved early care and education system.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

¹ See Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D., "Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010" (February 2011) at pg. 6.

² Ibid. at pg. 32-33.

³ See Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children" (August 2007) at pg. 7 and 9.

⁴ Ibid. at pg. 7.

⁵ Information provided to Cyd Oppenheimer, Connecticut Voices for Children, via an e-mail from Peter Palermino, Connecticut Department of Social Services, on January 10, 2011.

⁶ See "Connecticut State Budget 2010-2011 Revisions," *Connecticut Office of Fiscal Analysis*, available at http://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/Year/BB/2011BB-20100909_FY%202011%20Connecticut%20Budget%20Revisions.pdf at pg. 260. The state legislature appropriated \$103.4 million dollars to the Care4Kids program for FY 11. The appropriated amount for Care4Kids is listed as "Child Care Services-TANF/CCDBG" under "Legislative Revised Appropriation FY 11."

⁷ See “Care4Kids Program,” *Connecticut Department of Social Services Information Brief* (October 6, 2010), available at <http://www.ctcare4kids.com/pdf/changenotificationoct2010.pdf>. New applicants to the Care4Kids program earning up to 50% of the state median income remained eligible.

⁸ The average yearly cost of child care at a child care center in Connecticut is \$12,469 for an infant and \$10,121 for a preschooler, while 75% of the state median income for a three-person family in Connecticut is \$59,107. *For average yearly costs, see* Annemarie Hillman and Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D., “Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report, 2010” (February 2011) at pg. 6. *For information about the state median income, see* “Estimated State Median Income, By Family Size and By State for FY 2009,” *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* (2008), available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/liheap/guidance/SMI75FY09.pdf>.

⁹ See “Every Child Should Have a Chance to be Exceptional. Without Exception,” *Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement* (October 2010), available at http://www.ctachieve.org/pdf/commission_report.pdf at pg. 3, and 11-12.

¹⁰ See “Children’s Services Working Group Policy Proposals,” *Governor Malloy’s Transition Team’s Children’s Services Working Group* (December 2010), available at http://www.governor.ct.gov/malloy/lib/malloy/2-Children's_Services.pdf at pg. 4.