

Testimony Supporting Expanding Eligibility for a Child Care Subsidy to Parents Attending an Institution of Higher Education in H.B. No. 5708: An Act Concerning the Expansion of the Care 4 Kids Program
Cyd Oppenheimer, J.D.

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Senator Meyer, Representative McMahon, and distinguished Members of the Select Committee on Children:

I testify on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a statewide, independent, citizen-based organization dedicated to speaking up for children and youth in the policymaking process that has such a great impact on their lives.

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports H.B. 5708, which would expand eligibility for the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy to parents attending institutions of higher education. We believe that this expansion, which encourages parents to earn advanced degrees, will yield individual and societal financial returns.

Allowing parents to attend institutions of higher education forwards the ultimate goal of the Care 4 Kids program: economic self-sufficiency. Higher levels of education lead to higher earnings. An individual with a college degree earns, on average, more than 60% more over his lifetime than an individual with a high school diploma.¹ In Connecticut, the average hourly wage for a college graduate is \$26.39, compared to \$14.86 for a high school graduate and \$9.79 for an individual with no high school diploma.² In addition to earning higher wages, individuals with college degrees are more likely than others to be offered employer-provided health insurance and benefit plans.³ Higher levels of education also expand the job opportunities available to individuals. Sixty percent of the twenty fastest growing occupations in Connecticut – including computer software engineers, network systems analysts, and physical therapists – require a minimum of a bachelor's or master's degree (and, notably, command salaries in excess of \$75,000 annually).⁴

¹ Sandy Baum and Jennifer Ma, "Education Pays: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society," (College Board 2007): 9, available at http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/cbsenior/yr2007/ed-pays-2007.pdf.

² Joachim Hero, Douglas J. Hall, and Shelley Geballe, "The State of Working Connecticut, 2007," (Connecticut Voices for Children, September 2007): V17, available at <http://ctkidslink.org/publications/SOWCT2007fullreport.pdf>.

³ Id. at 15.

⁴ "Connecticut's Industries and Occupations: Forecast 2014," (Connecticut Department of Labor, Summer 2006), available at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/misc/forecast.htm>.

When parents obtain advanced educational degrees, their children benefit. Care 4 Kids helps both parents and children, by allowing parents to work while their children are in high-quality, language-rich, nurturing, responsive environments that promote their cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development.⁵ However, by expanding eligibility to parents attending institutions of higher education, Care 4 Kids can help parents and children in another way: improving the long-term prospects for both. Children of parents with higher levels of education enter kindergarten better prepared for school (recognizing their letters, being able to count to 20, writing their names) and are more likely to participate in athletic, artistic, and religious after-school activities.⁶ Cognitive skills of children between ages 3 and 5 have also been shown to be highly correlated with maternal education level.⁷

When parents obtain advanced educational degrees, society benefits too. College graduates are much less likely than individuals with lower levels of education to participate in public assistance programs or to be unemployed.⁸ The typical college graduate pays 134% more in federal income taxes, and almost 80% more in federal, state, and local taxes than the typical high school graduate.⁹ College graduates are also more likely to vote and to volunteer.¹⁰

Because of the many benefits of attending institutions of higher education, this attendance should be considered an “approved education, training, or other job preparation activity” for individuals receiving TFA. As written, H.B. 5708 would allow individuals who are *not* receiving TFA but are otherwise eligible for the Care 4 Kids program¹¹ to receive this child care subsidy if they are attending institutions of higher education. However, because participation in baccalaureate or advanced degree programs is not considered an “approved education, training, or other job preparation activity” per TFA regulations, parents receiving TFA would remain barred from working towards obtaining an advanced degree. There is no reason to differentiate between the populations at issue here. We thus suggest that H.B. 5708 be revised to include this additional language:

Participation in a baccalaureate or advanced degree program will be considered an “approved education, training, or other job preparation activity” for the purposes of participation in the Temporary Family Assistance program.

We believe H.B. 5708 – particularly with our suggested revisions – will help parents access a post-secondary degree so they can find secure employment and leave poverty behind. Accordingly, we strongly support this bill.

⁵ We note that, in order for children to fully benefit from Care4Kids, their parents must have access to the *full range* of providers, so that their children can receive services comparable to those received by wealthier families. For this reason, we support H.B. No. 5619: An Act Concerning Reimbursement Rates to Child Care Providers Under the Child Care Subsidy Program. Current rates have not been raised since 2001 and are well below even the fiftieth percentile of current market rates, meaning that parents can afford less than 1 out of every 2 child care providers on the market. H.B. 5619 would increase reimbursement rates to the seventy-fifth percentile of current market rates, meaning that eligible families would no longer be relegated to the cheapest providers but would have access to three out of every four child care providers.

⁶ Baum and Ma, “Education Pays,” at 24.

⁷ Id.

⁸ Id. at 18, 20.

⁹ Id. at 9.

¹⁰ Id. at 25, 27.

¹¹ Currently, four groups of individuals are eligible for Care4Kids: (1) those currently receiving TFA; (2) working parents who have received TFA within the past five years; (3) teenage parents attending high school; and (4) working parents earning below 50% of the State Median Income.