

Testimony In Support of

House Bill No. 5220, An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care4Kids Program to Parents Participating in Even Start and Certain Secondary Education Programs

House Bill 5222, An Act Expanding Eligibility in the Care4Kids Program for Homeless Families

House Bill 5213, An Act Concerning the Creation of a Pilot Program for An Early Childhood Incubator Model

Education Committee

March 6, 2020

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region. As a community foundation, we manage, grow, and distribute approximately \$1 billion in assets to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region, particularly in the areas of education, community safety, and economic and community development. Since 1987, we have invested more than \$40 million in early childhood development in the Greater Hartford area. It is our goal to ensure that all children, especially those most vulnerable, have access to high quality early childhood experiences. The Foundation has supported early childhood policy, funding, and program quality, recognizing their importance in ensuring optimal safety and learning outcomes for children and pathways to economic security for their families and caregivers.

The Hartford Foundation strongly supports House Bill 5220, which would extend child care subsidy eligibility to families in education and training programs. For many working families, access to affordable, reliable, and high-quality child care is a necessity to attain and maintain a job, as well as to foster the learning and development of their young children. Care4Kids is a critical program that ensures working parents can access safe, high-quality child care. Extending Care4Kids to families who are pursuing education or training to increase their earning potential will help families exit poverty and reach greater self-sufficiency.

In particular, we recommend that the committee ensure this bill extend Care4Kids to families in all job training programs. The Foundation has seen how essential access to child care is based on the experiences of participants in our Career Pathways Initiative. Since 2016, Career Pathways has served Greater Hartford residents who face significant barriers to employment. In 2017, 34 percent of all participants enrolled in our program reported having dependent children. **An evaluation of these workforce programs found that participants struggled with accessing child care.**

At a time when nonprofits, industry leaders, institutions of higher education, philanthropy and others are collaborating to support workforce development in Connecticut, extending Care4Kids to families in education and training programs is an investment in our children, our families, and the vibrancy of our state.

The Foundation supports House Bill 5222, which would provide homeless families with access to Care 4 Kids. Each year, the Foundation awards approximately \$1 million to local nonprofit

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organizations providing emergency shelter, housing subsidies, eviction prevention/landlord negotiation, and housing services to residents at-risk or experiencing homelessness. For example, in 2019, the Foundation provided a grant to the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. With that support, homeless children aged six weeks to five years of age were able to attend a licensed child care program for up to eight weeks. Providing child care services to homeless families can make a real difference to parents seeking to work and obtain stable, long-term housing.

The Hartford Foundation also supports House Bill 5213, which would allow the Commissioner of Early Childhood to issue a license to a person or a group operating an early child care program in a facility provided by an association, organization, corporation, institution or agency in the cities of New Britain, New Haven, Bridgeport, Stamford or Hartford.

Family child care centers are key to solving the dire shortage of child care for infants and toddlers, care that is linguistically and culturally appropriate as well as available during nontraditional hours. However, these child care entrepreneurs face significant barriers, everything from a lack of basic business skills to property owners and condominium associations that do not allow home-based businesses.

Family child care providers serve nearly two thousand children in Greater Hartford each day. While they are a major source of child care services for the region's working families, with many receiving subsidies from the state's Care4Kids child care program, providers often receive little or no professional development, capital support or other critical resources. The Hartford Foundation collaborated with the Office of Early Childhood to support the successful "Renovate to Educate" pilot program in Bloomfield, Hartford and Windsor that provided small grants to support facilities improvements along with professional development and coaching assistance. We have seen firsthand that the people behind these local child care centers benefit tremendously from this type of support.

This legislation would create a business incubator that offers new child care entrepreneurs a supportive place to launch their business and learn the skills essential to sustaining it. Connecticut's current early childhood laws prohibit family child care providers from being located outside the proprietor's home. This bill will allow someone to start a "Family Day Care" in an incubator space. In addition, this bill would allow the Office of Early Childhood's licensing and inspections unit to examine the issues before changing the regulations to offer this option throughout the state.

Family child care providers play a vital role in ensuring the health and safety of many of our youngest children, and provide access to affordable child care to thousands of working families throughout the state. This bill will provide unique support that values their important role in our early childhood system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at policy@hfpg.org or 860-548-1888.