

1. Name:

Cora D'Alessandro

2. Email:

3. Town *

Guilford

4. I am a: *

Please select at most 2

☒ Parent

☐ Childcare Provider

☐ Early Childhood Educator

☐ Community Organization

☐ Employer

☐ Advocate

☒ Early Childhood Teaching Faculty

5. Type or paste your Testimony here: *

My name is Cora D'Alessandro, and I am a faculty member in the Early Childhood Specializations at the University of Connecticut, Waterbury. I am also the parent of two young children enrolled in full-time early care and education. I am writing to express both my support for the vision behind the proposed Early Childhood Endowment and my deep concerns about urgent gaps that must be addressed if this policy is to succeed.

I work every day to prepare the next generation of early childhood educators, and I can confidently say that right now, recruitment into this profession is in crisis. I strongly support the intent behind requiring bachelor's-level teachers in state-funded programs and the commitment to paying them more. This is the direction Connecticut must go in to elevate the field and ensure high-quality environments for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. However, the gap between where programs are today and where this policy expects them to be is enormous. Programs are already struggling to hire and retain qualified educators. Many are at risk of losing their state funding simply because they will not be able to meet the new staffing quota quickly enough. And we, as faculty, are struggling to recruit students into early childhood programs because the pathway still does not make financial sense.

My students complete hundreds of UNPAID practicum hours required for graduation, even though the programs they are placed in are so understaffed and desperately need support. If we want bachelor's-level educators in every classroom, we need a system that makes entering the field financially feasible. That means:

1. Paid practicum and student-teaching opportunities
2. Clear incentives or scholarships tied directly to entering the early childhood workforce
3. Transitional supports so programs are not penalized while they build a qualified staff pipeline

The endowment is a promising step, but without these supports, we risk worsening the staffing crisis rather than solving it.

I also want to speak as a parent living the reality of Connecticut's childcare costs. My family pays 26% of our household income on childcare for our two young children. I want to emphasize that we are a dual-income household with stable employment, and yet the cost of care is equivalent to a second mortgage.

Under the proposed model, the center my children attend would not qualify as an Early Start Program because it does not meet the required percentage of families below the median household income. But that threshold does not reflect the real financial strain families across Connecticut are facing. Middle-income families, especially those just above the cutoff for Care4Kids, are being squeezed the hardest. We make "too much" to qualify for help, but nowhere near enough to absorb fees that exceed college tuition. If the goal is to build an equitable early childhood system, then affordability must extend to all families in Connecticut. Otherwise, we will continue to see parents, especially mothers, pushed out of the workforce because childcare costs exceed what they can earn.

I want to reiterate my support for the Early Childhood Endowment. It is a meaningful investment and a sign that Connecticut is taking this issue seriously. However, we cannot overlook the immediate and structural challenges.

1. The workforce pipeline cannot grow without paid training opportunities and better financial incentives.
2. Programs need transitional support, so they are not penalized while working toward higher qualification standards.
3. Parents across all income levels need relief from unaffordable childcare costs.

If we address these gaps, the endowment has the potential to transform early childhood education in Connecticut. If we do not, we risk building a system that looks strong on paper but collapses in practice.

Sincerely,
Cora D'Alessandro