

1. Name:

Frankie C. Vagnone, Chief Executive Officer, Stepping Stones Museum for

Children

2. Email:

3. Town *

Norwalk

4. I am a: *

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Parent

Please select at most 2 options.

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Childcare Provider

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Early Childhood Educator

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Community Organization

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Employer

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Advocate

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Other

5. Type or paste your Testimony here: *

Testimony: Early Childhood Education Endowment Public Hearing – Stepping Stones Museum for Children

Frankie Vagnone, Chief Executive Officer
Stepping Stones Museum for Children
303 West Avenue
Norwalk, Connecticut 06850

RE: Public Hearing of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Endowment Advisory Board

December 10, 2025

To the members of the Advisory Board, the Office of Early Childhood and Treasurer Russell's team:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony. My name is Frankie Vagnone, and I serve as CEO of Stepping Stones Museum for Children in Norwalk.

As a grandfather - Paw Paw to my 4½-year-old grandson - my Saturday Adventure Days at the museum remind me why this work matters. Watching children discover, experiment and grow fills me with hope. And it reinforces something we see every day at Stepping Stones: children need joyful, affirming learning experiences now more than ever.

For more than a quarter of a century, Stepping Stones has been a trusted early childhood resource for families across Connecticut. Yes, we are the state's largest nonprofit children's museum, welcoming more than 252,000 visitors this past year alone. But what sets us apart is that we are a hybrid learning ecosystem, blending research-based literacy experiences through our ELLI program with 40,000 square feet of artist-designed exhibits that spark communication, curiosity and confidence.

Through our Open Arms accessibility initiative, 24,000 children and caregivers accessed the museum last year regardless of financial means. Since fall 2024, more than 48,000 families have explored BooZoo's Book Nook, where every child receives a free, high-quality book to take home. We distributed nearly 13,000 books this year and are on track to reach 100,000 books by 2026. These are the kinds of experiences that change trajectories.

This Endowment is a bold and compassionate investment in the future of our communities. It sends a clear message to children, families and educators that Connecticut believes in them, values them and is committed to walking beside them. That commitment mirrors our mission at Stepping Stones. With more than 300 interactive role-play scenarios, 450 hours of literacy and creative communication experiences and 75 civic storytelling workshops built into our new Stepping Stones Village, we have become a statewide leader in early childhood learning, family engagement and social-emotional development.

As you shape the Endowment's first investment cycle, I hope you will continue centering equitable access, infant and toddler care, culturally responsive learning, and the wellbeing of early educators. Community organizations like ours stand ready to support this work with data, family engagement strategies, literacy programs and collaborative partnerships across the mixed-delivery system.

Stepping Stones Museum for Children is proud to lend our voice to this effort and even prouder to partner with you in the work ahead.

Thank you for your leadership and for placing Connecticut's youngest learners at the heart of this historic investment.

Respectfully,

Frankie C. Vagnone, Chief Executive Officer
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