

1. Name:

Joanne Kelleher

2. Email:

3. Town *

Southington

4. I am a: *

Please select at most 2 options.

☐

Parent

☐

Childcare Provider

☐

Early Childhood Educator

☒

Community Organization

☐

Employer

☒

Advocate

☐

Other

5. Type or paste your Testimony here: *

Dear members of the Early Childhood Endowment Advisory Board,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide my input on your work.

My name is Joanne Kelleher, and I am the Executive Director of Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington (ECCS), a non-profit that supports families and early childhood educators in town. We are the Local Governance Partner (LGP) for our community.

My request is that Early Childhood Endowment Advisory Board work with the OEC to re-evaluate the funding formula for LGPs and to increase the total award so it reflects the contractual obligations of the LGPs.

The work the LGPs are required to do in their community/region fall into three main categories:

- Support the needs of all families with young children, which could be measured by summarizing number of births over the last 6 years or Census figures. This category includes the work of the Parent Ambassadors, running the Community Table, conducting the Local Needs Assessment, and developing the Community Plan.
- Professional development and support for the entire early childhood education landscape – public and private, which could be measured based on the number of licensed and licensed-exempt childcare slots.
- Monitor the Early Start CT classrooms twice a year, which could be measured by the number of Early Start slots.

Using a formula that incorporates all three of these measurements would be more equitable.

The initial funding formula for LGPs, via their fiduciary, is based only a percentage of the total financial assistance provided to the Early Start CT funded providers in their town or region, up to a maximum of \$250K, with a minimum of what was received the previous year. The LGPs who are at that maximum were eligible for an additional \$50K match against local funding. This funding formula does not work for many communities, especially those who were not previously a priority School Readiness District with many Early Start slots.

For example, Southington currently has 12 childcare centers, 19 family childcare homes and 7 licensed or licensed-exempt school-year preschool programs, plus one center with a pending license. There is only one Early Start CT child development center in town with 45 State funded slots, which is what our LGP funding is based on. We were not eligible for the \$50K match. This percentage-based formula does not come close to covering the expenses of serving the over 2,500 children age birth to five in our town and almost 40 early childhood programs.

I saw the Endowment's SFY26 Spending Plan Budget has a line item for LGPs of \$4,700,000 for "Stipends for Parent Ambassadors, Quality Enhancement Funding, Incentives for regional LGP expansion, and match funds for every community LGP." This is a step in the right direction to address the underfunding if the funding formula is fair. Details about how this will be calculated and distributed have not been shared with the LGPs.

In addition to equitably funding the work of the LGPs, I would ask that this board:

- Increases the Early Start CT provider rates to support program participation, staffing, and parity with the public schools.
- Advocates for significant contributions to the Endowment each year to fulfill its promises and expand the Early Start CT slots. In our town only 3.5% of legally licensed slots are State funded (45 Early Start slots vs. 1,284 legally licensed capacity per 211), yet many more families would likely be eligible for free childcare based on the 27% free and reduced lunch rate in the public school district and the 29% of Southington households who met the United Way ALICE threshold in 2021.
- Encourage the CT legislation to continue to fund important programs like Care4Kids and Birth to Three services through the General Fund. We are hearing from programs and parents about the long wait on the Care4Kids enrollment system.

You are welcome to contact me to further discuss this.

Thank you.

Joanne Kelleher
www.southingtonearlychildhood.org