

1. Name:

Joyce Abate

2. Email:

3. Town \*

Norwalk

4. I am a: \*

Please select at most 2

Parent

Childcare Provider

Early Childhood Educator

Community Organization

Employer

Advocate

Other

5. Type or paste your Testimony here: \*

1.) Will C4K be available to families receiving Early Start after 7/1/27? This is imperative. Every early childhood program is a business. High quality for young children requires more money - I hope we are all in agreement with this concept because it is reality. C4K is a vital supplement income for programs, especially for those families that will have free child care starting 7/1/27. There has to be additional funding provided to offset the number of families that are paying the program nothing. Additionally, to make Early Start mandates/restrictions on programs' income work financially for programs, there can only be a certain percentage of free to the percentage of those paying - this is the calculative law of ratio. Otherwise, programs will go out of business. So, if C4K is not available, there has to be an alternative supplemental income provided/offered/made available for Early Start programs. Each time there has been a webinar or zoom meeting regarding the Early Start Endowment, the same question is repeatedly asked by providers - "Will C4K be available to Early Start families starting 7/1/2027?" The response by OEC at these meetings is: "We don't know". Providers that own their own programs plan ahead because of obvious reasons - that direction is good for many reasons as I'm sure you can understand. We need to know what income will be available to work with and what will not way before 7/1/2027. Please give us an answer to this important question about C4K. I've sat in on meetings where providers state C4K is a problem - however, C4K works very well as a supplemental income for many of our programs and is necessary.

2.) All the above also directly relates to the OEC's requirement for programs to increase the number of staff employed with teachers that have BA/BS degrees. Although that is a wonderful direction educationally, it's next to impossible to achieve - especially in programs that have a considerable amount of teachers employed and offering 1/3 of our Early Start enrollment as free from paying a parent share. In addition, as I'm sure you know, the cost of living in Fairfield County CT is more expensive than all other CT counties. This concept is reality and should be the catalyst to move OEC to provide increased funding to programs in Fairfield County. This has been a discussion for many years, since I served on the Governor's Child Day Care Council in the early 2000's - the issue has never been resolved and it should be. Staff wages, food, and most all expenses in Fairfield County are higher than in any other county in CT. High quality for young children requires more money and teachers employed with BA/BS degrees cost more money.

3.) In the last few years, I have observed the number of graduates receiving degrees in Early Childhood Ed, and degrees that are acceptable to CT OEC, across CT colleges and Universities. This number is extremely low as colleges that used to turn out 100's of such graduates, are now graduating under 10 graduates/year. Again - it is a wonderful goal for programs to employ teachers with BA/BS degrees, especially those that wish to make early childhood education their life-long career. Unfortunately this is currently an unrealistic mandate by OEC - to require programs to hire staff, (and increase the number of staff as time goes on), with BA/BS degrees as the number of those majoring in Early Childhood Ed, and degrees accepted by OEC in colleges and universities, is very low in proportion to the number of licensed and funded child care programs that are required by CT OEC to employ them.

3.) The Early Start Family Fee Schedule printed on the OEC website is so tiny that it's almost impossible to read. OEC please enlarge this so programs can easily print it and share it.

4.) Since the 8% increase per child is being offered by the Governor to Early Start programs, effective October 1, 2025, exactly when will Early Start programs be receiving this increase?