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VICE CHAIR, HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

MEMBER
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EDUCATION COMMITTEE

December 10, 2025

Re: PA 25-93 ENDOWMENT ADVISORY BOARD TESTIMONY

Commissioner Trueworthy, Representative Farrar, Senator Maher, and esteemed members of the Endowment Advisory Board, thank you for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to discuss the endowment program in this forum. I'm State Representative Robin Comey and represent the 102nd district of Branford.

I was very proud to offer my enthusiastic vote in support of Public Act 25-93, the Early Childhood Education Endowment. This investment is an important reflection of our state's commitment to Connecticut's families with young children.

Throughout my career I have been dedicated to ensuring our Connecticut families have access to quality, affordable, and accessible childcare. I have had the pleasure of working hand-and-hand with our childcare programs and the directors and teachers that are supporting our children's early development. They remain the most committed employees I've had the pleasure of getting to know, despite the shamefully low industry wages and healthcare benefits.

My reason to testify before you today is to offer you my support and hopefully some helpful insight into the priorities facing my constituents and the early childcare businesses that are in my community.

Branford is fortunate to have a good number of childcare businesses and family care options for our families. The Board of Education also has prioritized a preschool program for 4-year-olds, albeit on a limited schedule. From private high-end programs to state-funded programs and everything in between you would think that care would be easy to find and afford care. Yet because our surrounding towns don't have sufficient childcare, we are really serving several town regions, putting pressure on families to find available infant care. Fortunately, our programs are committed to increasing classrooms through the Early Start CT program.

As you are aware, operating a childcare is very difficult for a variety of interconnected reasons. The financial pressures being felt by programs include their rising liability, property, and healthcare insurance costs. Additionally, the fixed costs are a burden on these small businesses that already operate on a thin margin. Because of the economic squeeze there is little room for building improvements and capital projects. I am recommending the endowment supports our centers and family care programs with the necessary investment in facilities.

While staffing continues to be a significant challenge for the industry, I want to thank the OEC for their Scholarship Assistance Program helping working students get degrees and credentials.

I know for a fact that teachers are taking advantage of this opportunity while working in the programs in my community. With this endowment fund, we must continue to embrace and value investment in competitive salaries, educator pay and benefits. We can also do a better job encouraging our high school students to explore this career field and focus on building the education workforce pipeline.

I am encouraged by the recent investment in the Local Governance Partnerships. The guidance and relationships that are being developed have made an immediate difference as the OEC rolls out the new Early Start CT. I commend the vision for this new streamlined, state-funded early care program and your collective work making a sustainable model for early childhood care in our state. Thanks to this coordinated effort between the OEC and my local governance staff person, nearly all of Branford's early care centers are working towards accreditation to qualify for Early Start. Out of the seven centers they are working with, 2 were already accredited, 2 have begun the AQIS process and another 2 are consulting with the LGP director to explore the benefits of NAEYC accreditation.

I am pleased to report that focusing on offering our state's childcare programs carrots to improve quality, affordability and access is working in Branford. Even though our current Early Start program's waiting lists are long -- and getting longer, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel for families because of this Endowment. Continued investment in LGP's, scholarship assistance and capital investments in programs is crucially important to stabilize this industry for providers and for families.

Lastly, I would say the while we are keenly aware that CT's 169 cities love to embrace the independence of maintaining separate town operations, we must take into account that childcare may not fit that model so neatly. Working within our town borders is nice in theory but perhaps not so practical, as families are looking to neighboring communities to find the best fit for childcare. As the LGP leads communities through a needs analysis, we should be prepared to think and act on how a regional network of connected care could evolve.

I am grateful for your leadership on Public Act 25-93, I thank the Treasurer's office, the entire OEC team as well as this Advisory Board. I look forward to continued work together on this important issue.

Warmly,



Robin Comey
State Representative, 102nd Assembly District
Connecticut House of Representatives