



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD



Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

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Myra Jones-Taylor, Ph.D.
Commissioner

**Testimony of Myra Jones-Taylor, Ph.D., Commissioner
Office of Early Childhood
Before the Appropriations Committee
Re: Governor's FY16-17 Budget Plan
Tuesday, March 3, 2015**

Good morning Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Myra Jones-Taylor, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood. I am here today to testify before this committee concerning the Governor's FY16-17 biennium budget plan.

The Governor is faced with a daunting task of balancing a budget in extremely difficult state fiscal times. The Governor's budget eliminates or reduces several programs within the Office of Early Childhood. However, the vast majority of program funding is preserved. The budget plan also includes program transfers and reallocations. I will provide details about each of the major changes with the agency's budget.

Birth to Three Transfer

The Governor's budget transfers the Birth to Three program operations from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) to the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Statutory language is amended in S.B. 942 to align with this proposed transfer.

The Office of Early Childhood fully supports the Governor's proposal to transfer Birth to Three to the OEC. The Birth to Three program services and goals are closely aligned with the mission and vision of our agency. We anticipate the transfer will be seamless with no disruption of services to families and no changes to Birth to Three provider contracts. Due to lack of available office space at our agency, staff within Birth to Three will remain housed at DDS through a Memorandum of Agreement until the OEC moves to new office space at 450 Columbus Avenue in late 2016.

Birth to Three has been working closely with the OEC since its inception in June 2013. The acting director of Birth to Three attends weekly OEC Leadership Team meetings as a full participant. In addition, Birth to Three staff participate in our quarterly all-staff meetings as full members. The OEC has also attended the Birth to Three Inter-agency Coordinating Council meetings to share agency updates and provide information regarding the status of the proposed legislation.

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The majority of Birth to Three funding – nearly \$25 million – is proposed to be transferred to the OEC for staffing and program services. An additional \$7.25 million is proposed to be transferred to DSS for Medicaid claiming. This funding, which will be transferred to DSS, makes up the 50 percent state portion of Medicaid payments to providers. This means the amount paid by DSS to Birth to Three providers for Medicaid-eligible children will total \$14.5 million, with half paid for by the state and the remaining half paid for by the federal government. The federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services has instructed Connecticut that the preferred biller of services be the state’s Medicaid agency. I want to underscore that this Medicaid claiming change will occur regardless of the agency in which Birth of Three is located.

In FY14, Birth to Three served 9,686 eligible children ages birth to three during a 12-month period. Children are eligible for services due to either:

- A significant developmental delay
- A diagnosed medical condition with a high likelihood of resulting in a developmental delay

Diagnosed medical conditions includes: extreme premature birth or low birth weight; autism spectrum disorder; hearing loss; brain/spinal anomalies or infection; cleft palate; chromosomal disorders; blind or visually impaired. Birth to Three currently contracts with 43 providers: 3 specializing in children who are deaf or hard of hearing; 8 specializing in autism; and 31 general programs.

Birth to Three was supported in FY14 through four funding streams:

- State Funds: \$40,275,377
- Total Federal IDEA Funds: \$4,808,506
- Commercial Insurance: \$4,448,742
- Parent Fees: \$1,176,382

Reallocations

Currently, two contracts the OEC has with the United Way of Connecticut to administer the Care4Kids program are placed under the OEC Other Expenses line item. The budget proposal reallocates that portion of funding for this contract to the Child Care Services – TANF/CCDBG line item, which funds Care4Kids. Consolidating this contract into the Care4Kids line item is appropriate as it is consistent with the scope of work under this line item.

The budget reallocates \$1.3 million Care4Kids funding to support a new federal Early Head Start Child Care Partnership grant. This grant will provide high-quality comprehensive Early Head Start services to our poorest and most vulnerable children birth to three years of age to three federal Early Head Start grantees. This additional funding makes it possible for these three new Early Head Start Child Care Partnership programs to provide continuous services to children within these programs, whose parents do meet the eligibility criteria for a Care4Kids child care subsidy.

Head Start Enhancement, and Head Start – Early Childhood Link are reallocated to one line item under Head Start Services for a total of \$5,630,593. This reallocation will lead to increased efficiency in grants administration and reduce staff time administering these programs.

Funding Increases

Two OEC accounts proposed to receive funding increases are the Personal Services and Care4Kids line items. Payroll is increased to cover the annualizing of staff in FY15. These positions include 15 new child care licensing positions to enable the OEC to move to annual inspections of licensed

family child care homes and child care centers, two child care licensing supervisors, two fiscal positions, one legal staff, one grants and contracts specialist, eight office assistants-for processing criminal background checks and taking electronic fingerprints in locations around the state.

The Care4Kids line item is proposed to increase to cover costs negotiated last year as part of the union contract SEIU Local 2001 – CSEA representing licensed family child care homes and unlicensed family, friend and neighbor providers who receive Care4Kids subsidies. These include a 3% Care4Kids rate increase for licensed family child care homes, a 10% differential Care4Kids rate increase for infant and toddler care for licensed family child care homes, and a \$3 hourly Care4Kids rate increase for unlicensed family, friend and neighbor.

Overall, the OEC budget is increased by 11% from FY15. This includes the transfer of \$25 million for the Birth to Three program, union contract costs, the annualizing of staff costs and to annualize the 1,020 School Readiness slots added in the FY15 budget from nine to 12 months. Without the addition of Birth to Three, the OEC budget is increased by 2%. However, at the program level, as detailed earlier in this testimony, some programs have been entirely eliminated or reduced, and FY15 rescissions are annualized.

Reductions

The Governor’s budget eliminates funding for three programs in our Family Support Services Division: Help Me Grow (-\$331,462), Family-School Connection (-\$915,934,000), and Family Empowerment Programs (-\$191,516).

- Help Me Grow is a state-wide information and referral system that helps identify children at risk for developmental delays and connects them to services. In FY14, 2,108 calls were placed by families to Help Me Grow and 4,343 children were screened using the Ages & Stages Questionnaire. The OEC contracts with the United Way of Connecticut to manage and staff Help Me Grow.
- Family School Connection is prevention-based program that reaches out to families identified by school systems concerning children, ages 3-8, who are struggling with truancy, chronic absences and behavioral issues in school. In FY14, the program served 159 families. Family School Connections provides services in Middletown, Norwich, and New Haven.
- The Family Empowerment Program (FEP) educates high-risk parents dealing with significant life challenges such as domestic abuse, teen parenting, drug abuse and incarceration. The program reaches about 700 parents annually through seven FEP providers: ABCD Parenting run by The Child Guidance Center of Greater Bridgeport, Fatherhood Initiative fund by Madonna Place in Norwich, Focus on Fathers run by Wheeler Clinic at Osborn Correctional Prison in Somers, Friendship Circle run by Rushford Center in Middletown, MELD Parents of Preschoolers run by Family Services of Greater Waterbury, M.O.M.S Program run by the Hospital of Central Connecticut in New Britain, and Mothersshare in Hartford.

The Governor’s budget also eliminates funding for Community Plans for Early Childhood (-\$750,000). The Community Plans for Early Childhood funding provide matching funds to 36 partnership grants for Discovery Communities to support their local early childhood councils or collaboratives. The funding to these Discovery Communities is through a public-private partnership between Graustein Memorial Fund, Connecticut Children’s Fund and the OEC. With the FY15 rescissions, the grantees each received \$19,791 from the OEC for the current fiscal year.

Also eliminated is Improving Early Literacy (-\$150,000), which provides state matching funds to six communities to improve reading by strengthening the relationship between school- and community-based early literacy efforts and also provide support for kindergarten transitions. This funding is matched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Graustein Memorial Fund. The communities receiving Improving Early Literacy funding are Bridgeport, Colchester, Torrington, Middletown, New Haven, and New Britain. With the FY15 rescissions, the grantees received \$23,750 from the OEC in the current fiscal year.

Funding in the Child Care Services program serving school-aged children is eliminated (-\$808,056) with the remainder of state funding (\$18,614,289) maintained to serve children birth through preschool. Currently, 245 school-aged children receive before and after school care as well as care during school breaks. Communities offering part-time care impacted by this elimination are: Bridgeport (10), Enfield (60), Griswold (8), Killingly (9), Manchester (26), Milford (3), New Canaan (14), New Milford (16), North Haven (30), Plainville (9), Plymouth (5), Winsted (4), and Windham (21). Hartford offers 30 full-time school-age spaces during school breaks and summer break, which will be eliminated. These programs may be able to apply for afterschool funding within the State Department of Education.

Bridgeport ABCD's Program under the Head Start – Early Childhood Link (-\$800,000) will also be eliminated. This program was originally earmarked as part of a scientifically designed study called the Total Learning Initiative, which is a multi-sensory, arts-infused approach to curriculum delivery and embedded personnel development. The program serves children in five classrooms, one in each grade level K-4.

Federal Funding

Before closing, I would like to share good news. The Office of Early Childhood has been working toward obtaining federal funding that will provide fiscal support in meeting our mission. During this fiscal year, the agency has been awarded several federal grants totaling \$35,615,695. Our Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program has been awarded both Competitive and Formula grants totaling \$23,125,695.

The OEC was also awarded a \$12.5 million Preschool Development Grant of an anticipated four-year grant for a total of nearly \$50 million. This grant will enable 14 high-need communities to provide high-quality, comprehensive services to 712 four-year-old children whose household income falls under 200% of the federal poverty line. The 14 communities are Bridgeport, Derby, East Haven, Griswold, Groton, Hamden, Hebron, Killingly, Manchester, Naugatuck, Seymour, Torrington, Vernon, and Wolcott.

Infusion of these federal grants will support the vision and mission of the Office of Early Childhood. We will continue to seek other funding opportunities to leverage the investments that the state has made in our youngest children. I want to thank the Appropriations Committee for its long-standing investment in our youngest children and their families. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and I would be happy to take any questions.