

**Introduction**

Good morning Chairman Shays. I am Joyce Thomas, Commissioner for the State of Connecticut's Department of Social Services. On behalf of Governor Rowland and his administration, I want to thank the members of our federal Congressional delegation who are here today . Thank you Chairman Shays, Representative DeLauro, Representative Johnson, Representative Kennelly, and Senator Dodd for giving me the opportunity to testify. We also want to extend a hearty Connecticut welcome to our guests from other states, including Representative Towns, Representative Snowbarger, and Representative Pappas. I trust you will let us know if there is anything we can do to make your stay more informative and more enjoyable.

**Background on Department of Social Services**

The subject of today's hearing is "Early Head Start: Goals and Challenges." The purpose is to "examine the mission, plan and performance standards for the Early Head Start program." Before I begin, let me acknowledge that we have two Early Head Start programs operating on Connecticut, Our interest in these issues could not be greater, particularly since the mission of the Department of Social Services is to serve families and individuals who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance, and independent living. To accomplish this mission, we employ about 2,300 employees, with recurring operating expense of approximately \$142,000,000 per year. DSS is designated as the state agency

responsible for administering a host of programs that directly or indirectly provide goods and services to poor and vulnerable families, women, men, youth, and children, including seniors and people with disabilities. We administer over 90 legislatively authorized programs, and approximately one-third of the state budget's federal funds. We administer most of our programs through offices located throughout the state. Services for most programs are available at 15 offices located in five regions. In addition, many of our services are provided through a network of community-based agencies, such as Community Action Agencies, homeless shelters, Workforce Development Boards, and senior centers. We also send staff directly into various communities to expedite and facilitate the provision of services. For instance, we are the first and only state social service agency to operate an office and provide a full array of services in a public-housing complex (Stowe Village, in Hartford). We also provide on-site services at various hospitals and Healthy-Start centers.

For families and children, *Jobs First* provides Temporary Family Assistance (formerly AFDC), employment services (formerly JOBS), and safety-net services to welfare families. We also provide child-support enforcement, childcare, Food Stamps, rental assistance and other housing-related services, preventive services, and medical services. For those who are elderly and disabled, we provide a State Supplement to SSI, Rehabilitation Services, Nutritional Assistance, Housing Assistance, Home Care, Pharmaceutical Assistance (ConnPACE), Nursing Home Advocacy, Protective Services, AIDS Drug Assistance, independent living, assistive technology, and medical services. For communities in general (without regard to age, family status, or

disability), we operate the Community Services Block Grant and the Social Services Block Grant. We also provide Legal Services, Nutritional Assistance, Housing Assistance, Heating & Utilities Assistance, medical services, General Assistance, and a multitude of services that relate to homelessness and housing.

**Connection between childcare and welfare reform**

It is impossible to look at the field of childcare and early-childhood development without considering the effect of welfare reform. As you know, Connecticut has had tremendous success in moving families from welfare dependence to independence and self-sufficiency through employment. Through a combination of a 21-month deadline and a generous package of support and incentives, we have helped thousands of people escape the dead-end that was welfare. As of January, 1998, over 46% of our caseload were reporting earnings. Currently, About 1,000 families a month break free from welfare because of increased earnings. And we have exceeded the federal work-participation rates. Yet in all of our success, we have not lost sight of two facts: About 90,000 of the people who benefit from welfare are children under the age of 13. Of this number, about 25% are infants and toddlers.

A significant part of our success in welfare reform comes because we have affirmed that parents need support as they look for and retain employment, particularly in the area of childcare. It has been projected that within the next two years, 26,000 families transitioning from cash assistance will need childcare. This will lead to a demand for 35,000 childcare slots. Connecticut

acknowledges that an increase in the number of welfare parents who enter the workforce must be attended by an increase in childcare access and quality. And we are meeting that challenge. For instance, in 1994, Connecticut spent approximately \$28 million on childcare. In the current year, we will be spending approximately \$153 million, benefiting about 30,000 children (up 42% from the year before). To meet the projected increase in the need for childcare, we will continue working with Head Start and other agencies to expand the hours, times, days, and slots for childcare. We also will keep working to establish and increase high-standards for quality and safety across the state.

**Connection between healthcare and childcare**

Connecticut also has affirmed that strong and independent families need healthy children. Beyond serving families on welfare, Connecticut has made sure that medical services are available for children up to 185% of the poverty level. Connecticut also has made sure that needed medical services are still available when a family moves off welfare. Just as critically, we have affirmed that the intellectual and emotional development of children should not be separated from their physical development. Our “whole person” approach to early childhood ensures that children receive virtually all of the allowable medical services, including immunizations and preventative care, especially in the context of childcare.

But we can do more, and with our HUSKY plan, Connecticut’s own Title XXI program, more is what we will do. As you know, it is painful for the mother or father who can’t help a child

because money is too tight to pay for healthcare. Thanks to the unified efforts of the United States Congress, President Clinton, Governor Rowland, and the Connecticut General Assembly, we have launched a program that will provide health insurance to nearly 90,000 uninsured children here in our state. HUSKY will work like private insurance, and will be available to all families on a needs-tested basis. Depending upon income and the numbers of children in a family, the insurance will be available without charge, or with slight premiums, or with small co-pays. But the genius of HUSKY, if I can use that word, is that it will allow families from all across Connecticut to group together so that 90,000 kids can access one of the finest packages of insurance services available in the state. That is the potential for HUSKY, but it's a potential that cannot be realized without effort and outreach. That is why a significant part HUSKY will be undertaken through outreach to and collaboration with Head Start and other childcare programs.

**Brain research and Connecticut's leadership in childcare**

About three weeks ago, I had the good fortune to sit on a panel with First Lady Hillary Clinton, who came to Connecticut to discuss the President's proposals to improve childcare. I was pleased to note that much of what President Clinton is proposing has already been advanced here in Connecticut. To put it simply, our goal is year-round, full-day, high-quality childcare that develops healthy and school-ready children, not just for traditional "pre-schoolers," but for all children, from infancy onward. As acknowledged by the White House, Mrs. Clinton visited "Connecticut to learn about exciting developments in the area of early learning." Much of what

we have accomplished here in Connecticut has been derived from examples that we have seen in Head Start. And much of what we have learned and completed in the area of early childhood development can benefit existing and potential Head Start programs.

Dr. Edward Zigler, who will testify today, has been a great pioneer and educator in the field of what is now being called "brain research." What the research has shown, and shown conclusively, is that action and activity presented to children, from infancy onward, stimulate brain activity, promote intellectual and social skills, and -- what is perhaps most critical -- actually promote literal, physiological brain growth. When it comes to social, familial, and cultural policy, it becomes incumbent for all of us to recognize that a child's "education" should actually begin before first grade, before kindergarten, before nursery school, and before toddlerhood. Indeed, it should begin at infancy. Once this fact is affirmed and acknowledged, it becomes clear that the childcare, especially during the early years, must be systemically and culturally integrated with early childhood development and education. And it becomes especially clear that this principle must apply to children who -- because of poverty or any other reason -- are at risk, as well as children who are mentally, physically, or emotionally challenged.

Fortunately for all of us, much of what we have done here in Connecticut has been derived from the pre-existing examples that we have seen over the past 30 years since Head Start was launched. In this regard, it is important to note that Head Start's programs and practices tie into, buttress, and found what is now an emerging trend, one that Connecticut has taken the lead on.

Because of the work and tradition that is Head Start, policy makers and the public in general are quick to apprehend that what we now call “childcare” is not just “babysitting.” Rather, quality childcare includes a host of wrap-around services to promote health and safety, as well as intellectual, emotional, and cultural development for all children, including and especially those children who might be at risk or might be disabled. This is one of the great legacies of Head Start, one that we can continue to build on as our culture moves more and more into the realm of out-of-family care and early-childhood development.

#### **Collaboration in Connecticut**

We in Connecticut also have used Head Start as an example for early childhood organizational development. As originally crafted by legislation and implementation, Head Start is first and foremost about community collaboration, parental involvement, and parental empowerment. We in Connecticut have taken a significant leaf from the Head Start book by promoting accessible and quality childcare that is both innovative and collaborative. Our School Readiness initiative, includes own Department of Social Services, the Office of the Governor, the General Assembly, the Connecticut Departments of Public Health, Education, Children and Families, and Public Safety, as well as the Connecticut Health and Education Finance Authority, the Commission on Children, UConn, the Connecticut Community Technical Colleges, and local municipalities. Just as importantly, our local School Readiness Councils, like Head Start, invite and require not just community collaboration, but parental involvement and empowerment. The Commission on Children’s Parent Leadership Training Institute, a program that the White House supported in

principle at the recent forum on childcare, is integrally tied to the goal of getting parents more involved in school readiness and active on school readiness councils. In substantive as well as in organizational development, we all have inherited much from the legacy that is Head Start.

We have told you a small bit of what we have learned from the example of Head Start. But it is also important to note what we in Connecticut have accomplished through collaborative, systemic links to Head Start. First, recognizing the important role that Head Start plays in our communities, we have launched an initiative to extend Head Start operations. By uniting Department of Social Services funds, Education funds, and federal Head Start funds, we have been able to ensure that Head Start programs can offer comprehensive services to welfare and low-income families on a full-day, year-round basis. Through our School Readiness initiative, we've created an Early Childhood Training Academy and a Childcare Facilities Loan Fund, which can train and develop childcare personnel, and expand childcare capacity for Head Start and other programs. We also have partnered with the Office of the Governor, the State Department of Education, and Headstart to win a five-year federal grant that supports the Governor's Collaboration on Children. Through this very broad collaboration, which includes a multitude of public and private entities, we will develop and implement an action plan to ensure that children in Connecticut obtain all the services they need for their health and development.

As with Head Start, collaboration and innovation have been the keystones of much of our work in the area of childhood development. And while we're speaking of collaboration, we should



acknowledge the support that much of this work receives from the federal government. While most of the funding for childcare and School Readiness programs come from state revenues, supplemental funds are received from Temporary Aid to Needy Families, the Child Care Development and Block Grant, and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG). We greatly appreciate your continued assistance in ensuring appropriate and adequate funding that helps the states meet their childcare needs.

### **School Readiness**

We have told you somewhat of how we and others have benefited from collaboration with and lessons from Head Start. Now we would like to talk a bit about our School Readiness initiative, because we sincerely believe that this landmark initiative has much to offer. Using state funds, and with unparalleled support from the General Assembly, we have launched a landmark School Readiness program across Connecticut. Through this landmark collaboration, the program effects a "perfect marriage" between childcare and early-childhood development. In programs that are now up-and-running in 14 priority school districts, this novel and innovative approach expands the supply of childcare, while upholding and increasing the quality components of caregiving and education so that children are both safe and school ready. By integrating health with early-childhood education, childcare facilities also provide extensive health care assessment and services. Especially because local needs can vary greatly, the programs are directed by local School Readiness Councils, formed by local mayors and school superintendents, which represent municipalities, parents, educators, businesses, health care providers, and other key members of

the community. With the organizational and financial infrastructure in place, these programs meld child care, childhood development, and educational advancement so that three, four, and five years olds are fully equipped to attend and succeed in school.

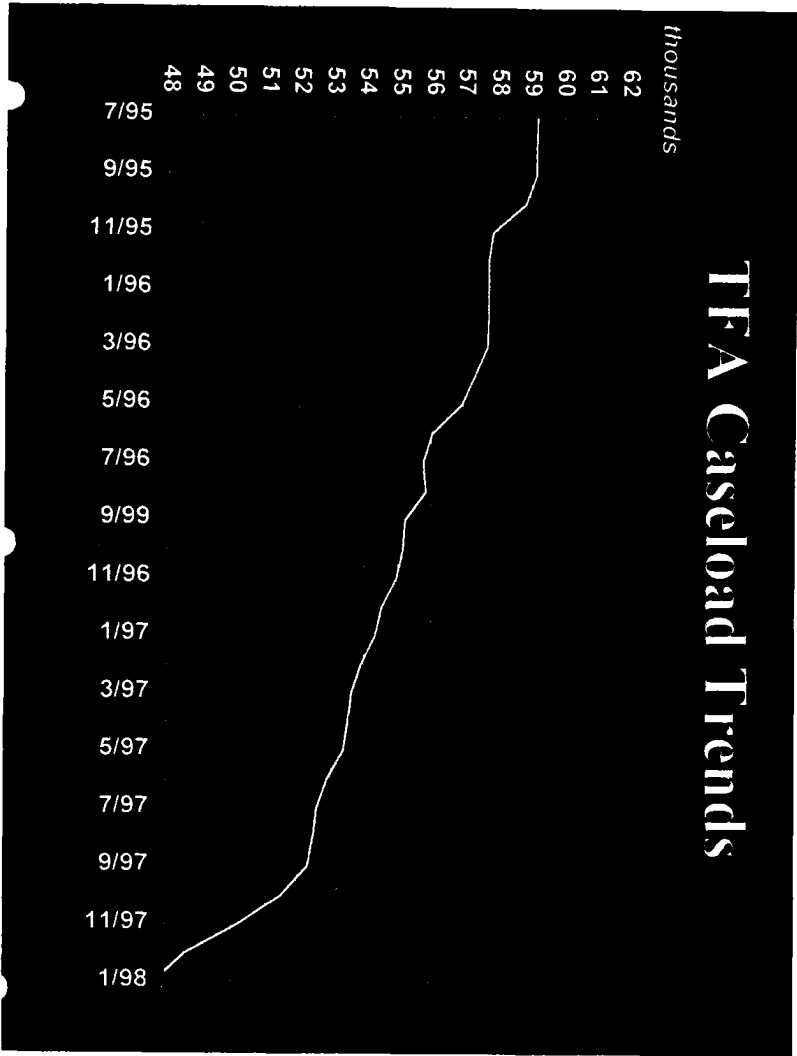
At the same time, the program creates Connecticut Charts a Course, under which the Community Technical Colleges are helping child care providers become fully qualified in school readiness. Finally, the Connecticut Health and Education Finance Authority (CHEFA) administers the Child Care Loan Fund, designed specifically to help local councils develop and improve their child care facilities. To help children outside of the 14 priority municipalities, the program also allocates funds for severe-need school districts and for quality enhancement grants. At this point, school readiness targets children who are three and four years old. But, because development from infancy is so crucial, we hope to keep working with our partners to expand school readiness to include children from birth to three years old.

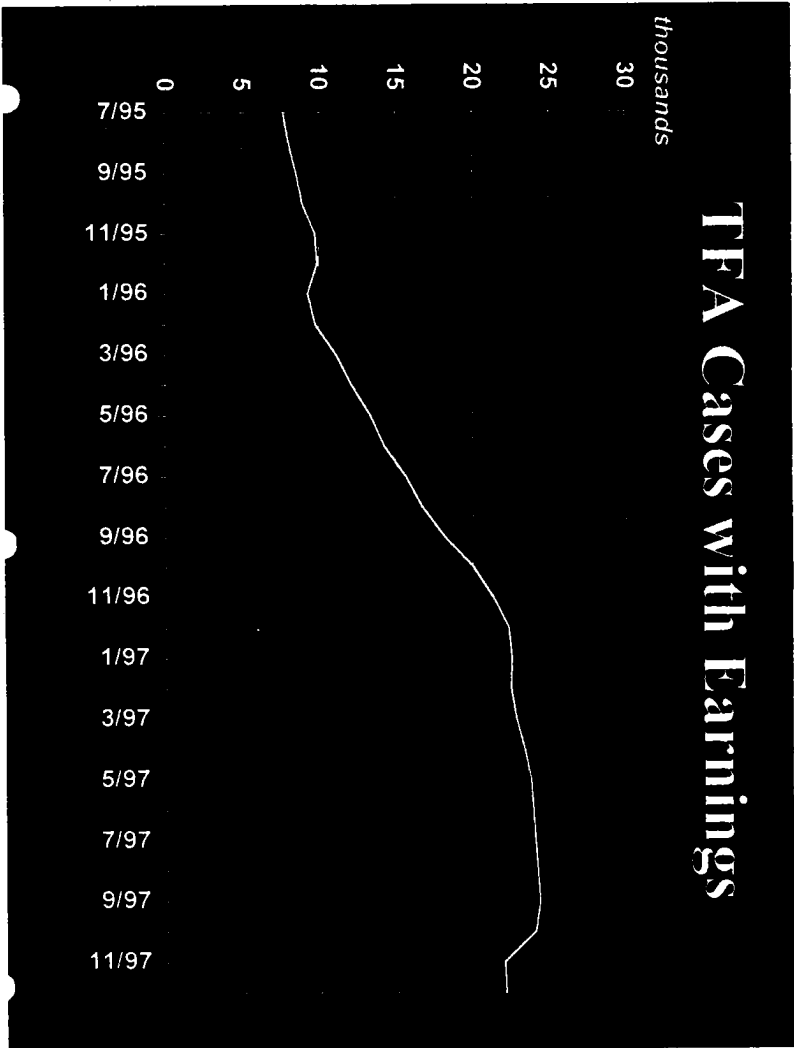
### **Conclusions**

Our experience in Connecticut suggests how childcare and Head Start can continue to improve and develop. The childcare system cannot ignore the critically important years that include infancy and toddlerhood. The impact and purpose of welfare reform cannot be ignored when it comes to developing a childcare system that has more slots, more access, and more quality. As more and more welfare and other parents move into the workplace, childcare for all children, from infancy onward, needs to be available full-time, including mornings, evenings, and

weekends. A “whole child” approach to childcare must ensure a systemic connection between the intellectual and emotional growth of children, their physical health and development, and their welfare and safety. Any discussion of expanding or creating more childcare slots must take into account the need to build more facilities. Expenditures for “bricks and mortar” and related capital improvements such as chairs, furniture, computers, and internet links must be taken into account. And in the end, there must be room and incentive for collaboration and innovation.

We are confident that others can benefit from the spirit of innovation and collaboration that is making School Readiness such a success in Connecticut, and we will be happy to answer any questions that you might have.





# Child Care Expenditures

