

Testimony to House Human Services Committee
February 21, 2018
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Hello, My name is Kelley Hackett and I've had a Registered Home childcare for 9 years. I have been a PreK Partner for 4 years. I have 3 children of my own, an 11, 9, and 2.5 year old. Today I would like to speak to the language in the PreK bill regarding several different issues.

The first two issues relate to the requirement for pre-k partners to have 4 Stars. I would strongly suggest this bill include language that allows for provisional status for programs that might temporarily lose their 4 Star rating. When my youngest was born I took 3 weeks maternity off without pay, then I hired a substitute to work for me part time for another 3 weeks. She had been a long time substitute in both private programs and the public school and I knew her from town, so I felt confident in my choice.

Unfortunately, during her last week of subbing an incident happened, causing me to get a serious violation because of the way she had handled the situation. By getting a serious violation, I immediately lost a Star and went from a 4 Star program to a 3 Star program. After going through the emotions of getting my first ever violation, postpartum, and the shock of 3 children on top of working full time I was able to focus on making a plan to get back up to 4 STARS so that I could remain in the PreK partnership the following year.

If the proposed language eliminating 3 Star programs working to 4 Stars had been in place, all of my children and families would have been at risk of losing their PreK funding and could have resulted in families leaving, causing me to have to close my doors. My story is unique, but I would suggest that any bill you pass include language to allow for provisional inclusion in the pre-k program for providers who temporarily lose their 4th Star but have worked with the Child Development Division on a plan for getting their 4 Star rating back.

In regards to other programs that are 3 Stars, and have the drive to attain 4 Stars, I would suggest you consider allowing these programs to be considered as pre-k partners. These programs have worked really hard to get to where they are and because of the way the STARS rating system is designed, it forces programs to take time to reflect on their programs and make changes over a period of time thus requiring them to need adequate timing to move forward. Allowing these programs into the pre-k system will expand access for more children.

Another concern I have is connected to the potential negative consequences of centralization. My understanding is that AOE is considering a centralized, online registration for pre-k, and I am concerned that some families in areas that have poor internet access, or who lack computer access, will not submit applications. Local libraries won't be able to help people figure out how to fill out forms. Too often computers are barriers for low-income families, not helpful tools.

I would also like to share my concerns with separating private programs from public programs. When I first became a PreK partner four years ago, there was a lot more collaboration and partnering within the school than there is today! Private and public programs would collaborate during teacher in-services, partners were part of the preschool selection process and overall the feeling of programs were close to equal.

By separating the two and having AOE oversee the public programs, the division will only grow greater. Already this division has occurred, for public and private programs no longer collaborate for teacher trainings, preschool selection, or referring of children to one program or another.

By having AOE oversee the public programs, the separation could lead to more strain on private providers if public providers become competitors rather than partners. This could potential lead to the closure of more quality programs, creating a higher demand for high quality childcare programs.

As the Starting Points Leader in my town of Waterbury, I host a networking group of providers on a monthly basis. All of the providers in my network are in STARS and many of them are 2 and 3 Star programs. We gather together to discuss challenges in our programs and regulations, celebrations, desired professional development and give ongoing support to each other.

It has been expressed at several meetings that private programs are losing preschoolers to the schools that run part-time programs, and families are continuing to seek part time care which is difficult to come by. Some providers have recently considered closing their doors because of the lack of collaboration and preschool children. If these programs close then there will be greater hardship for families seeking care for their children under the age of 2.

Other concerns that come to mind with AOE overseeing public programs is that of the inequality of regulations between the two programs. It is worrisome to think that a public school classroom would different, and perhaps less stringent, regulations than private providers. The current regulations are there to be sure that children's social/emotional needs are being met. Both public and private providers should have to comply with them.

I would also worry that if AOE oversees public programs, they would become more focused on academic learning versus play and social emotional learning. It is evident that today's children do not have as many opportunities to play and be children as they did in years back. Too often we hear of children in kindergarten needing extra support in reading body language, interacting with peers and learning to regulate themselves in social situations. All this happens in the early years of development in small, supported and healthy programs. A socially and emotionally developed child is a child ready to learn.

Thank you for your time and consideration!