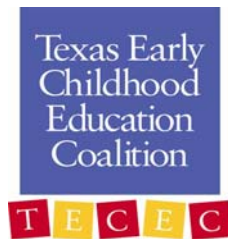


Testimony of:

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(TECEC)



Before the:

House Human Services Committee

**C.S.H.B. 2269**

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

Good afternoon. My name is Kara Johnson and I am the President and CEO of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). TECEC represents more than 350 organizations and 6,000 members and partners from across the great state of Texas. Our partners include representatives from public schools, Head Start, child care, the business community, higher education, foundations, community based organizations, and more.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Chairman Raymond, Vice Chairman Morrison, and the entire House Human Services Committee for hearing my testimony. I would also like to acknowledge Representative Mark Strama for his leadership and dedication to improving the child care subsidy system in Texas. The child care subsidy system is a critical component of the overall high quality early education system our Coalition is working to build here in Texas.

In 2009, our Coalition created a Child Care Subsidy Work Group to bring together experts from all across the state to address the urgent need for reform in the Texas child care subsidy system. At that same time, Representative Mark Strama and the entire House Technology, Economic Development, & Workforce Committee spent much of 2010 studying child care in Texas under the following Interim Charge:

*"Review ways in which communities can meet increasing demand for child-care services while preparing children to succeed in school, including the implementation of the Texas Workforce Commission's Child Care and Development Fund Plan for Texas."*

The result of this research, statewide dialogue, and leadership is the bill you see before you, C.S.H.B. 2269. There are a number of outstanding components included in this bill that have the full support of our Coalition members and partners, including the following:

1. **A move towards adequately funding the Texas Rising Star Program across the state.** The Texas Rising Star Program is one of the certification and accreditation systems utilized in Texas that helps licensed child care centers, as well as licensed and registered child care homes serving children ages birth to 13 achieve higher levels of quality. The Texas Rising Star Program must be a part of the overall early education system in Texas because of its broad focus on children ages birth to 13. Other accreditation and certification systems in Texas may focus on specific ages or may be too expensive for certain providers to participate in. As a result, we applaud Representative Strama for filing this critical piece of legislation that will improve this important system that will be accessible to child care centers and homes that serve children ages birth to 13 in Texas.
2. **Another great component of the bill is the focus on infants and toddlers.** Because Texas has the fastest growing child population in the country, Texas parents need affordable and quality settings for their infants and toddlers. There is already a lack of available child care openings for parents with infants and toddlers. HB 2269 incentivizes child

care centers to increase their quality and serve additional infants and toddlers.

3. **The creation of a Texas Rising Star Program Review Work Group.**  
**The last time a workgroup thoroughly reviewed the Texas Rising Star standards was back in 1999.** A lot of new research has emerged since that time on best practices around quality early education and school readiness preparation. Therefore, we are pleased to see that Rep. Strama has included a work group in the legislation to ensure that the new standards are based on the latest research and data on working with young children.
4. **The recognition of the benefits of technical assistance.** Research demonstrates that true quality happens in classrooms when teachers and directors receive mentoring and/or technical assistance. This has been demonstrated across the country as well as right here in Texas with the Texas School Ready! Project. We are thrilled to see this is included in the legislation.
5. **Finally, TECEC is thrilled to see other high quality components such as increased training hour requirements, guidelines for who can train, as well as incentives for child care centers that provide high quality care.**

While this is a solid piece of legislation that we fully support and would like to see move forward, we do believe there is one thing that would make it even better. We agree with many of our partners that the Texas School Ready! Project

should be included in this legislation. There are a number of reasons for this, including:

1. **We do not want to create a disincentive for providers to become Texas School Ready! Certified.** The Texas School Readiness Certification System is nationally recognized for its unique ability to measure both the quality of early education settings, as well as student outcomes. That way, we ensure that children not only have access to high quality care, but we also know that they are entering kindergarten school-ready and on level with their peers.
2. **We do not want to complicate the efforts of the Governor-appointed Texas Early Learning Council (TELC).** The primary goal of this council is to enhance Texas' ability to prepare children to enter kindergarten school ready. One of the things the Council is tasked with is further strengthening Texas' inclusive, mixed-delivery approach by improving and integrating the existing early education standards and guidelines, thereby incentivizing ways for local communities to come together and share approaches to quality early education and school readiness. By not including the Texas School Readiness Certification System in this legislation, we are improving one much needed system at a potential cost of another. Texas needs both.
3. **The Texas School Ready! Certification System is the only one in Texas that monitors quality across early education setting, including child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k.** At the end of this

legislative session, we may see Texas' pre-k program reduced to a half day. As a result, school districts will be looking to partner with child care and Head Start to ensure parents have access to a full day of care. Texas must ensure it continues to build a robust certification system that meets the needs of all three early education delivery systems.

- 4. We do not want to lose the investment that has already been made in improving the early education system in Texas.** In 2003, Texas legislators passed with bipartisan support, Senate Bill 76 which launched a movement towards quality and accountable early education in Texas. Since that time, millions of dollars have been infused into child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k systems. We do not want to lose the momentum that has been built in the state. Instead, we want to capitalize on it by building up the Texas Rising Star system, while continuing to provide incentives for those participating in the Texas School Readiness Certification System.

We feel the best way to include the Texas School Ready Project in the legislation is to direct the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to add the Texas School Readiness Certification System as one of the categories included as a *child care provider who may be certified as a Texas Rising Star Provider without going through the Texas Rising Star Provider assessment process and are initially enrolled as a Four-Star or fully certified provider.* We also recommend that TWC be directed to certify just classrooms and not entire child care centers. This will address the concerns of some in the field that entire child care centers

receive an enhanced rate of reimbursement, even if just one of their classrooms is certified. We believe this is a great compromise and will ensure that we continue to build a high quality system in the state of Texas that improves all systems simultaneously, as opposed to one at a time, or at the cost of one for another.

Texas has the fastest growing early childhood population in the country. In addition, this rising population has increased numbers of English Language Learners, and children living in poverty. Texas must do everything it can to ensure that children have access to high quality early learning environments that are not only safe and developmentally appropriate, but also prepare children to enter kindergarten school-ready. The committee substitute of House Bill 2269 would do just that by strengthening the Texas Rising Star System while including the Texas School Readiness Certification System.

On behalf of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.