

Public Hearing Written Testimony for Senate Bill No. 0930: An act concerning the school entrance age.

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Good morning, my name is Kathryn Walsh. I have been an administrator in Connecticut public schools since the year 2000. Currently, I am an elementary school principal at Preston Veterans Memorial School in Preston, Connecticut. We are a small, rural pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade school with a population of 293 students within the District Reference Group (DRG) E. Today, I am here to ask that you support Bill 0930 in order to help reduce the variance in ages and developmental needs of in our kindergarten classrooms.

Connecticut and Hawaii are the only two states in the United States with a kindergarten entrance requirement date for a child turning 5 years old on or before January 1<sup>st</sup>. As a result, a child may begin kindergarten as young as the age of four years and eight months or as old as five years and eight months. Additionally, a family may choose to keep their child at home until the child turns seven years old.

The reality is that there may be children that are developmentally, more than one or two years behind their peers. This may generate the potential for an educational gap that could possibly set in motion an achievement gap that requires many years of intervention before a student experiences success.

Due to Federal mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Response to Intervention (RTI) or Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) in Connecticut, schools and towns are facing financial burdens to ensure that mandates are initiated and maintained with fidelity. The current economic reality in Connecticut presents increasing difficulties for our schools. Intervention specialists and behavioral experts place financial burdens on schools that are already experiencing budget restraints. For example, Preston Public Schools has presented the fiscal year 2011-2012 budget with a 0% increase for the third consecutive year. In other words, if our budget passes, this will be the fourth year in a row that Preston Public Schools will have a 0% change in our fiscal year school budget.

The Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) and Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) whole-heartedly endorse the gradual rollback to

October 1<sup>st</sup> as the kindergarten entrance requirement date as long as there is dedicated support for high quality universal pre-kindergarten programs.

Kindergarten today is not what kindergarten was years ago. Children are expected to be able to read before the end of the school year. This can only be accomplished with kindergarten programs that build upon quality pre-kindergarten programs that use assessments and data collections that support and direct the teaching and learning of our youngest students.

Another reality today is the mobility of families. Connecticut children move out of state and there are incoming kindergarten students, with an October 1<sup>st</sup> entrance date, that produce huge age and developmental discrepancies among kindergarten students.

Connecticut's children should have the right to attend kindergarten classes with age, size and developmentally appropriate peers. Our schools are expected to advance all children to higher levels of learning and with deeper understanding regardless of the vast age and developmental ranges in classrooms. By deleting the provision allowing parents to withhold enrolling their child in kindergarten until seven years of age and concurrently increasing the age of enrollment, our Connecticut schools will be more capable to improve academic achievement and advancement for all children.

Thank you for your time.