



Testimony in Support of SB3747

*Submitted by Janice Moenster on behalf of Children's Home & Aid
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Good afternoon. My name is Janice Moenster, and I am the Director of Early Childhood Services for Children's Home and Aid's Southern Region. I want to thank Senator Morrison for both conducting today's hearing and sponsoring this legislation. Children's Home & Aid is a statewide social services agency with programs ranging from early care and education programs to behavioral health services to child welfare programs. Our mission is to advance the well-being of children by investing in families to disrupt the systemic and multi-generational cycle of racial, social, and economic inequality. As part of those efforts, we operate one of the largest Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) outside of Cook County, processing over 4,000 applications for the Child Care Assistance Program each month.

Today, I am here to urge your support for SB3747, which would expand eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) through the Department of Human Services (DHS) to children in care, youth in care who are parenting, children of families receiving Intact Family Services, and families receiving Extended Family Support Program (EFSP) services through the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS). This effectively transfers the processing for eligibility and child care payment functions currently housed at DCFS to DHS.

This transfer of functions is essential to support children and providers across the state in receiving and delivering quality care. As an early care and education provider and CCR&R agency, we know the difficulties we and other providers face in working with two different processes and systems of payment for providing early care and education services. Children and families sometimes wait months for approval to utilize services and then their providers to receive payment through DCFS. Providers who are struggling to stay afloat can't wait that long for payment of their services. Child care providers had increased costs to protect children during the pandemic, programs also had to reduce group size, now more than ever they need consistent and reliable payments to keep children safe and tax-payers working. These payment delays discourage providers from accepting children whose child care payments come from DCFS. As less providers accept DCFS payments, it is more difficult for foster parents/caregivers to find early care and education for their children. We have a great need for foster parents in Illinois, and we don't want access to early care and education to be yet another barrier to recruit and retain foster parents.

To streamline the process and ensure children in care, youth in care who are parenting, children of families receiving Intact Family Services, and families receiving EFSP services have the same access and quality care as other children throughout the state, we can effectively utilize the structure DHS already has in place through CCAP to provide assistance. Additionally, this allows providers and caregivers/parents to interact with one system to receive early care and education for their children. Finally, this legislation aligns with the recommendations from the Governor's Early Childhood Funding Commission. The Commission urges the state to streamline its early care and education infrastructure into one agency, and this bill moves us one step closer to that goal.

SB 3747 also makes infants and toddlers in care automatically eligible for Early Intervention (EI) services. EI provides critical, evidence-based prevention services to children and can potentially change a child's school trajectory by providing appropriate environmental factors known to influence early brain and child development. Automatic eligibility for children in care removes an initial

evaluation to determine eligibility and streamlines the process for these children to receive needed EI services.

Thank you for your time today and the opportunity to speak on how we can support children and families in Illinois. I am happy to answer any questions you may have on the legislation.