

# Education Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5326 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

**Title:** AN ACT INCREASING THE RATES FOR THE BIRTH-TO-THREE PROGRAM.

**Vote Date:** 3/16/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

**PH Date:** 3/4/2026

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill intends to provide a rate increase to providers of Birth to Three early intervention services, this rate increase is based on phase two of the rate study published in 2024. The bill was proposed because there has not been a rate increase for providers since 2017.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

Underlying bill requires rates to be in accordance with rates described in phase II of the Medicaid rate study required in PA 23-186, § 1; substitute replaces that with rates from the most recent rate study and cost analysis

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) supports the proposed legislation to increase funding for Connecticut's Birth to Three program, they note that this rate has not been increased since 2017. They raise concerns about the growing workforce shortage and feel this bill will help with retention and recruitment. They discuss the Governor's proposed budget saying it would expand the current two-tier reimbursement system to five tiers based on staff qualifications and align pay with credentials. This change is based on a 2024 rate study, which aims to strengthen services provided to children and their families. The OEC also supports efforts to ease benefit cliffs for families, however they prefer the current structures that are in place for early childhood program access.

### NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Ashley Baehr, Early Childhood SPED Teacher, shares the current shortage of therapists and special educators, due to recruitment and retention challenges. She highlights that there has not been a reimbursement rate increase in 10 years, which is one of the causes for people to leave the profession. She urges for the committee to support the bill as it supports the mission of early intervention in Connecticut.

Elaine Balsey, Director, Reachout, supports the bill, but raises questions surrounding language in the bill, in Phase 2. She shares that the “new” tiered rate of reimbursement should be rejected and suggested it be based on level of education/ licensure instead. She says that this is not a sustainable solution and will cause more people to leave the workforce.

Jeannie Barletta, ReachOut, supports the bill, specifically providing a rate increase, without investing in a new tiered reimbursement structure. She expresses concern over the current workforce crisis, sharing issues with recruitment and retention. She cites a statewide study surrounding the reimbursement rates that shows it doesn't cover the current cost of provided care. She urges the committee to add to the budget, to align with the statewide references, to better meet needs of care providers.

Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), cites the importance of addressing developmental delays early on, and shares about their dedication to their work with children. They say that early intervention specialists' salaries have not been adjusted to deal with inflation or for their years of hard work, and that it should be raised. They share this bill will help to deliver fair compensation for essential services that they provide.

Katie Belanger, Licensed Behavior Analyst, Rehabilitation Associates of CT, addresses how families across Connecticut are positively impacted by Birth to Three and says it is often a moment of hope for them. She shares that to be a sustainable Birth to Three system, it requires adequate reimbursements rates. She urges the committee to provide needed rate increases to strengthen the Connecticut's Birth to Three system.

Debra Bianchini, Birth to Three Provider, discusses the hardships faced by her and many other employees, due to retention issues. She says that underfunding the workforce undermines the outcome of what the program is trying to achieve. She says the underfunding creates gaps, that causes for inconsistency and causes more issues for the children they are treating. She encourages additional funds to be added to the Governor's adjustment bill. She says that ongoing investments are needed to create stability in the workforce, create equality and allow for high quality service for Connecticut families.

Mercedes Blye, shares her personal experience with having two kids in the Connecticut school system. She expresses frustration with the current lack of funding, says that students and teachers deserve proper funding to receive/provide a proper education.

Cindy Jackson, Executive Director, Children's Therapy Services,  
Kirsten Burke, Bilingual Speech Pathologist, Children's Therapy Services,  
Avery Doyle, Speech Language Pathologist, Children's Therapy Services,  
Liberty Mahon, Developmental Therapist, Children's Therapy Services  
raises concerns over the current recruitment and retention, and how this bill will affect this aspect of the workforce. They say the proposed framework devalues experienced workers and risks causing negative effects to the overall system. They provide suggestions on how to

improve the bill, saying that there should be a stipend and other incentives for providers with advanced credentials, and further support initiatives to help programs strengthen their Birth to Three services. They also recommend creating a statewide rate for birth to Three services that align with current professional and paraprofessional tiers.

Claire Borkowski, Occupational Therapist, Rehabilitation Associates of CT, shares her first-hand experience of both working for and having a family member receive care from the Connecticut's Birth to Three services. She urges the committee to pass the bill and keep the current tiered reimbursement structure.

Rebecca Breen, Director, EASTCONN Birth to Three, discusses her support for the bill, but urges the committee to reject the proposed tiered reimbursement system. She says that with changes to the tiers those who have higher level degrees would be on some of the lowest tiers, which is not reflective of their work. She cites a study done in 2024 that found that current reimbursement rates are not reflective of the work being done by care providers. She further shares the current issues faced in the work field, due to the low reimbursement rates, and urges the committee to support increased funding.

Michelle Busha, Developmental Therapy Specialist, EASTCONN Birth to Three, highlights her dedication to this line of work, and discusses how she moved up in the field. She says that the proposed new tier reimbursement system is disheartening and undermines the work that she and many others have done, in this field. She urges the increase of funding for Birth to Three and requests that the committee reject the proposed new tiered reimbursement system.

Brianne Bryne, Speech-language pathologist, Birth to Three, calls for action to increase the reimbursement rate of Birth to Three, which better reflects services provided. She says this is critical for workers and families involved in Birth to Three programs. She shares the stress that she and her colleagues have faced in relation to caseloads and expectations, all while feeling financial pressures in the industry. She requested that this bill be passed, within the current tier structure and to reject the proposed tiered structure.

Sarah Culbertson, Speech Language Pathologist, Reach out emphasizes that the current reimbursement rates are not keeping pace with the current expenses of daily life. She shares that this rate is not sustainable and causes many providers to struggle financially. She further shares the negative impacts on families when care providers leave the profession, due to current costs. She calls for action and urges the committee to increase the reimbursement rate, to properly reflect the current financial market.

Denise Daviau, CEO, Lumibility, describes the importance of a rate increase for the Birth to Three program, as there has not been one in 10 years. There are concerns raised about the increasing rate and changing the structure, as they feel it will prevent stability in the system. They feel the new structure will cause further issues with retention and recruitment. Concerns were also raised about the proposed reduction of the General Administrative Payment (GAP), they say reducing GAP directly weakens stability for providers and their ability to support staff. They urge the committee to pass this piece of legislation, with changes to the language surrounding the proposed tiers.

Kathleen DeLuca, discusses how she was personally impacted by the Birth to Three program, she describes how it has positively impacted her child, who needed early intervention. She asks the committee to pass this bill, as it is an investment in the young children of Connecticut.

Heather Denegris, Speech Language Pathologist, testifies in support of the bill and requests that rate increase be implemented in the Birth to Three program. She shares that appropriate financial support will support current needs of children, but also help to decrease the future needs for educational and health care costs.

Brian Donahue, Founder, NOT JUST US, calls for the increase of the rates of services, for the Birth to Three program. He says that currently due to the lack of increase in years, many staff are leaving cause for more delays for children who need the services. He says these delays affect everyone in the community, and that we need to invest in the costs now rather than having to pay more in the future.

Sarah Eagan, Executive Director, Center for Children's Advocacy, urges for the committee to pass the bill, she raises concerns on implementing the tiered pay structure. She says that the structure proposed by the Office of Early Childhood, does not consider the Governor's budget which will lead to shortcomings, and does not support retention and recruitment. She also provides material on the importance of early intervention.

Bruni Edwards, Director, EdAdvance Birth to Three, says there are gaps that need to be closed and this bill is a step in the right direction. She says the current paraprofessional/professional tiered system is appropriate and fits. She discourages the committee from adapting the proposed tiered system. She says to keep quality care and create stability this investment is important.

Rita Esposito, Board Member, Reachout, says that the workforce is committed, qualified and compassionate. She says she supports the additional funding, but comments that it is significantly short of the amount proposed in the Governor's proposed budget in 2025. She says that without proper funding many will be forced to leave the profession, to find another way to provide for their families. She says that B-3 needs further funding from the state of Connecticut.

Susan Flanagan, Director, CREC, requested the committee to provide increased funds, under the current tiered reimbursement structure and to sustain the current General Administrative Payment (GAP) rather than switch to the one suggested by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). She highlights current issues in the workforce recruitment and retention, saying the bill can help to fix this. She also addresses the importance of GAP and says it should be increased rather than decreased.

Deborah Ford, Clinical Supervisor, Building Bridges, states that this bill is critical for children, families and providers involved in the Birth to Three programs. She shares the issues of recruitment and retention, as they are having a hard time competing with other work settings to attract qualified individuals. She shares the overall feeling of frustration, from hers and others in the profession, as there is widespread burnout throughout the workforce. She requested the bill be approved by the house to increase their current rate, but not adapt the new tiered proposed structure.

Emmeline Franklin, Public Policy and Advocacy Associate, The Alliance, cites the 2024 Annual Data Report published by The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and shares the major findings. Findings conclude that rates haven't increased since 2017, which are cutting into providers' financial stability. Despite being highly educated, Birth to Three professionals earn less than peers in other settings. They say better pay is needed to keep recruitment and retention rates from falling lower. They urge the committee to support this legislation.

Chelsea Galisoto, Regional Supervisor, Rehabilitation Association of Connecticut, requested that an increase rate be added to the B-3 system. She says this helps to provide a more "robust early intervention" curriculum to children. She shares the effects that the agency has seen due to the stagnant rate. She cites the loss of providers and other programs due to the low pay. She further shares her support for this bill.

Karen Galvin, Physical Therapist, Reachout Inc., urges the committee to reinstate funds for the Birth to Three and DDS budget line, which will lead to the improvement of recruitment and retention. She requests that the current GAP payment remain the same rate. She further requested to keep the current reimbursement system, stating that compensation should be based on qualifications and licensure. She shares frustration over the lack of reimbursement rate increase, and data on why it needs to be updated.

Merrill Gay, Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, shares the importance of early intervention and how it changes the trajectory of many of these children's lives. They share data on inflation and operational costs, in comparison to the current rate of professionals in the field. They support the bill but aim to maintain the two-tier system rather than the proposed five tier system.

Kate Giampetruzzi, Occupational Therapist, Creative Interventions, supports the increased rate, as it has not increased in many years. She says that the increase will help to support the company she works for as they are currently competing with more competitive salaries. She says this will allow them to be more successful in recruitment and retention.

Laura Gilbert, Developmental Therapist, The CT Early Childhood Alliance, says the current funding provided is short of what is needed for providers of Birth to Three. She requests that there is an increase in order to have a more livable wage. She cites a study that showed that many staff leave the field to pursue other careers when they are told the pay rate. She requests for more adequate funding be provided, for more quality care for children.

Kristina Gilbertie, Director, Rehabilitation Associates of CT, requests the Committee keep the current tiered reimbursement structure, and hold the GAP payment at \$200 per eligible child. She shares some issues that are possessed if the committee is to implement the proposed tiered reimbursement structure. She says these issues include financial barriers, feasibility, and state capacity. She also discusses the equity concerns of the proposed structure, saying that many highly qualified professionals will be reimbursed at a lower rate. She strongly supports the rate increase, while changing language to maintain the current tiered reimbursement system.

Carrier Gill, License Behavior Analyst, Building Bridges, highlights the importance of this bill to professionals who work in the B-3 system. She discusses the problems faced, as there are growing needs of birth to three families and increased issues with recruitment and retention.

She asks for the bill to be approved to increase rates, but to keep the current tiered structure.

Julie Hill, Deputy Program Officer, Lumibility, discusses the issues of not having a pay increase, as there is a growth in inflation, raise in demand, and workforce cost. She shares data from the Birth to Three Rate Study. She urges CT to make this investment now, as there is an increased demand for Birth to Three services. She advocates for language to be added surrounding General Administrative Payment (GAP) to protect the amount and have language in statute. She shares the further impact of underfunding on children, families and providers.

Vicki Holt, Developmental Therapist Associate, EASTCONN Birth to Three, urges the committee to reject the proposed new tiered reimbursement system. She shares the effects of underfunding in the workforce. She says the proposed new tiered reimbursement will cause more strain on the workforce and the issues they already face. She requested the bill be passed to increase the rate, with the rejection of the new tiered reimbursement system.

Steven Hunt, President, Building Bridges, supports the increase but requests existing language be modified for clarity on the structure rate increase. He says the increased rate will improve recruitment and retention. He cites the increase in demands and expectations in the profession, as it has led to burnout among many in the workforce.

Stephanie Kelsey-Reynolds, Occupational Therapist, Reachout, discusses her work in the field, and shares the struggles she has faced due to the salary rate. She touches on the issues programs face due to poor salary rates, which lead to higher turnover and a more difficult time recruiting. She requested funds be added to Birth23 and DSS budget lines to better align with the current cost of living in Connecticut.

Rachel Leitkowski, Physical Therapist, EASTCONN, shares that the proposed new tiered reimbursement system would hinder the long-term financial benefits for the state. She says this will place those who have been in the field for years, and have vast experience, will consider leaving. She shares her own experience of the effects from OEC, in terms of paperwork and trainings. She urges for the support of increased funding, while not changing the tiered reimbursement system.

Patricia Martineck Occupational Therapist, Birth to Three, highlights in her testimony that the proposed tiered reimbursement system is unfair and unrealistic. She shares this may worsen underfunding and workforce shortage. She urges the adoption of an increased rate but recommended the proposed tiered not be added.

Danielle Middlebrooks, Director Advocacy, The Arc Connecticut, cites the importance of early intervention and how it is cost-effective for public policy. She shares the strain currently placed on providers across the state. The gaps leave providers without the tools to address the children they are carrying for needs. She shares the need to increase the rate, but not have it tied to tiered rate or structures and says the General Administrative Payment (GAP) must remain at the same rate.

Jennifer Miklautsch, Director, Therapeutic Services, shares the importance of early intervention and her own personal experience working in the field. She shares data collected

on the effects of having a stagnant rate for the past 9 years. She urges the committee to fully fund B-3 services and Medicaid through a rate increase. She says the Governor's proposal is not enough to sustain B-3 and to also include reduction in the GAP making the net increase in funding lower. She urges the committee to not invest in the new tiered reimbursement structure.

Leslie Monahan PT, Assistant Director, Rehabilitation Associates Inc., tells the story of seeing many providers leave the early intervention field as salaries are not competitive. This poses an issue for families and children, as then the programs are not able to continue. She shares that the benefits of early intervention help save the state money, in the long run. She requested for the Committee to pass this legislation as it will help providers, children, and families all across Connecticut.

Sheila Murrihy, Senior Director, Harc, raises concerns about the language of the bill and requests changes be made to remove the proposed Phase Two. She says the new requirements under this tier will be unfair to those who have worked in the field for years. She shares that the current reimbursement structure is underfunded but is functional, and that the committee should work to strengthen the existing framework.

Nicole Neylon, Assistant Director, Rehab Associates of Connecticut, requested the rate increase to the system, but keep the current tiered reimbursement structure. Saying that increased funding would better support staff recruitment and retention. She is certain that there is no capacity for the OEC to support the training purpose, for credentials. She shares the positive impact that increased rates will have on children and parents in the system, but to keep the current structure for the reimbursement system.

Stephanie Noble Puchkoff, AuD, CREC Soundbridge, says that the proposed tier system is concerning. She shares the loss of staff due to maintenance stress and demands for OEC in regard to paperwork. She says the proposed credentials would take over a year to complete and that OEC doesn't have the coverage to complete the observations, which will cause more time to complete the credentials. She urges for the passage of a rate increase, but with the current tier structure.

Juliana Oyola, Regional Supervisor, Rehabilitation Associates of Connecticut, shares the impact and importance of early intervention. She says that the strengthening of these programs will cause a decrease in need for health care and education costs across the state. She urges the committee to support the needs of families across Connecticut, by supporting this legislation.

Nicole Robbins, Speech Language Pathologist, states that the expanded tiered system will not change the rate of pay. She requested language changes to base reimbursements off current professional/paraprofessional levels and not the expanded tiered system. She shares fears of having to leave the profession due to rising cost of living and not matched pay.

Seidy Rodriguez, Physical Therapist, Birth to Three, shares how the stagnant pay has led to workforce shortage, especially in bilingual providers. She highlights how important early intervention is in the development outcome of young children. She cautions that not supporting legislation like this will cause Connecticut to spend a greater cost in the future and put many kids at a disadvantage.

Nicole Rumpf, Speech Language Pathologist, highlights the loss of valued staff members, due to stresses surrounding growing OEC documentations demands and maintaining productivity requirements. She raises concerns over the proposed tier system, saying that it does not compensate based on years of experience, degrees and other important factors. She says the training should enhance practice for better quality care rather than determine reimbursement levels. Supports legislation with changes to the language surrounding the tier levels.

Melissa Samperi, Developmental Therapist, Rehabilitation Associates Birth to Three, cites her recent work in the field. She says that while the Governor's proposed bill includes money, it is not enough to prevent strain on the already strained system. She says it is crucial to maintain the current tiered reimbursement system. She says raising the rate would allow for programs to employ new providers and retain experienced professionals.

Tricia Sartor, MS OTR, CREC, explains the program has not had an increase in rate since 2017, causing for employees to burnout, staff shortages, and reimbursement rates that don't cover service cost. The proposed tiered payment system would underpay most providers and make it harder for adequate funds to be reached, despite many of their years of experience and training. She supports the bill to increase the rate and changes made to the proposed tier system.

Kathleen Satalino, Director of Staff Development, Creative Interventions, discusses the major challenges that the system is currently facing, such as, rising requirements that are not reimbursed under the current fee-for service model, and recruitment and retention issues. She requested the committee to maintain the GAP payment, reverse proposed cuts to the GAP program, increase funding to B-3 services in line with the state cost study, and avoid implementing a new tiered reimbursement structure.

Ruchi Sheth, Research and Policy Associate, Connecticut Voices for Children, highlighted the importance of early intervention services for children with developmental delays. Shared that the low provider reimbursement rates are only covering a fraction of the actual costs. They urge the committee to support rate increases, but to not rely on the 2024 study, as it may not be accurate to current inflation. Without early intervention services it risks worse learned outcomes and higher long-term costs. They recommend the increase of overall funding to strengthen the B23 system.

Michelle Singer, Language Pathologist, Rehabilitation of CT, shares that this work is done to help the "foundation of the next generation". She shares the work she has done and how she has seen the positive impact it has had on the children, who receive services. She requested the committee invest in the future of the children of Connecticut, and work to continue to attract and retain highly qualified experienced professionals. To do so she says that this legislation is a step in the right direction.

Jenna Solis, Developmental Therapist, Birth to Three, discusses the weight her and others in the field have felt from, the pressure of the heavy caseload and expectations, all while organizations are feeling financial strain. She expresses a growing frustration within the profession, among colleagues. She approves the increase in rate and requests that the new tiered proposed structure not be adapted.



Elizabeth Wilke OT, Director, Harc, she overall supports the bill, but has reservations around the proposed tiered reimbursement structure. She says the full reimbursement amount for the rate study is needed to stabilize the program. She recommends continuing with the current existing structure which has only professionals and paraprofessionals.

The following are parents who have children in early intervention programs. They feel that providers should have a rate increase. They share that this will help for retention and recruitment in the field. They say this will help ensure that children, like theirs, are receiving care from highly qualified providers. They urge the committee to pass the legislation to support children and their families.

Anonymous 70  
Shannon Iannone  
Franklin Mora  
Drew McWeeney  
Antuanett Ortiz  
Max Pierre  
Patrifel Remigio  
Emily Zuber

Sharon Hoffner, Physical Therapist, Abilis, Shares that the current rate that is being given to providers is not enough. She explains the importance of her job as an advocate for families and their children. She supports the rate increase of the bill.

Lisa Jones, Speech Language Pathologist, Rehabilitation Associates of CT, discusses the importance of the program and the positive effects she has seen it have on children. She urges the committee to go forward with the rate increase, but with the current reimbursement structure.

Madelynn Schulte, LCSW, Abilis, discusses how she has seen the program change the lives of the children that she works with. She says without programs like this families would struggle to navigate early interventions for their children. She urges the committee to help Connecticut move in the right direction.

The following share of the bill is critical for the professionals in the Birth to Three population. They also highlight the importance of being able to attract and retain professionals in the field, in order to provide quality care for children and their families. They all share their love for working in the field but note a growing frustration as there is a sense of burnout among colleagues. They cite a rate study done in 2024 which indicated that the billing rate is higher than their current rate. They request that the bill be passed to increase their current rate, but not to adapt the new tiered proposed structure.

Stephanie Johnson, Speech Language Pathologist, Birth to Three  
Kathryn Lamontagne, Birth to Three SLP, Building Bridges  
Michelle Rodrigue, Developmental Therapist, Building Bridges  
Kathryn Roman, Speech and Language Pathologist, Birth to Three  
Maria Serrano, Developmental Therapist, Birth to Three  
Elena Nemphos, Occupational Therapist, Birth to Three  
Heather Page, Occupational Therapist, Birth to Three  
Ethan Peplau, HR Generalist, Birth to Three  
Kimber Perrotta, Developmental Therapist, Birth to Three  
Dana Sorvillo, Speech language Pathologist, Birth to Three

Laura Summers, Physical Therapist, Building Bridges  
Kimmy Uzar, Developmental Therapist Specialist, Building Bridges  
Stephanie Wiatr, Developmental Therapist, Building Bridges  
Kathy Jo Winters, Developmental Therapist, Building Bridges

Jacquelinie Neiman, Speech language Pathologist, Birth to Three, shares that it is important to have this rate increase, as these providers are the “backbone” of the Birth to Three programs. She cites the rate study done in 2024 and shares this is further reason for rate increase. She asks for the committee's support on this bill and to pass this legislation but keep the current rate structure and to not adapt the proposed tiered rate structure.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

Amy Bouchard, BCB, Harc, raises concerns about the language in the bill, specifically around Phase Two. She shares that providers are not requesting a new redesign of the current two-tier rate structure. Rather they are requesting the rates be increased to better reflect the cost of services provided.

Anonymous 866, opposes the legislation, calling it “redundant and worthless”.

**Reported by: Megan Oros**

**Date: 4/2/2026**