

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Public Education  
For HB 1614  
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Hearing Date: March 21, 2023 8:00 AM

David Fincher  
Cotton Mill Learning Center, National Child Care Coalition  
Mesquite, TX

We are FOR HB1614. With only approximately 50% of our children Kindergarten Ready when they enter Kindergarten, we must develop our prekindergarten delivery system to enable access for as many as possible of the approximately 90,000 eligible children who do not get the educational foundation essential to their success in life. HB1614 is a step in the right direction, but we must continue to envision and implement policies that will catch these 90,000 children who fall through the cracks in our existing delivery system.

Amy Anderson  
Self  
Round Rock, TX

If teachers do not receive a pay raise, there will be so many job openings these pre-k teachers will not exist. Is this really more important than securing teachers for next year?  
I am a high school math teacher for 25 years. I have twins in their 2nd year at UT Austin. I have to turn in my 60 day notice to move out of my apartment by the end of March. If I am not making more money, I cannot afford my apartment or my job. Well, I need a place to live. I will have to find a different career.  
Please make teachers a priority and let us know you care a little about us. If HB1548 is not at top priority of Public Education Committee, then teachers are leaving. I hear it everyday!

Blake Simpson  
Whistle Stop Station and By The Barnyard Gate  
Rockwall, TX

I believe the best way to help children with their growth and development is to help them get education as early as possible. Many parents cannot afford childcare with rising costs of childcare it is becoming unaffordable for many parents to afford good quality childcare. If there were funds available to help these parents be able to afford childcare for their kids this would help their children to get the education they deserve and help them not be left behind in their education. There are many amazing Pre-schools located throughout Texas and they provide good quality care. Many public schools have been opening up their schools to pre-school but they do not have the resources and facilities to best take care of preschool age children. Not to mention they are struggling with staffing for elementary all the way up through high school age. I think the legislator can make a huge impact on children's education by passing this bill and make sure that children have access to good quality education.

rusty simpson

whistle stop station/by the barnyard gate

heath, TX

We are for this Bill. This is would help enormously with the loss of our Pre-K Programs and would put the decision of the childs future back into the parents hands.

Kimberly Kofron

Children at Risk

Round Rock, TX

Nearly 15 years ago, I was working for a child care program when we were approached with the idea to partner with our elementary school across the street from us to provide a Pre-K classroom with them. They had more Pre-K eligible children than they had room for, we had a classroom which sat empty during the school day as it was used for Kindergartners during after-school hours. Through many conversations between the ISD, Workforce Solutions and us, we were able to start a Pre-K partnership before HB3 was even a thought. And while HB3 has given more momentum to Pre-K Partnership, many of the same challenges that existed back then, still exist today.

When setting up a Pre-K Partnership there are many details to work out from the small things like how do we record attendance and how the children participate in picture day, to larger things like how are lunches provided and how will we staff the classroom. However, all the details rely on one thing—all participating children have to meet both the requirements for public school Pre-K and for child care subsidy program. These two programs currently have two different eligibility requirements. The eligibility for children using child care subsidy through Texas Workforce Commission a family income of 85% of State Median Income whereas, eligibility for public school Pre-K is based on 185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines. Therefore, when setting up a Pre-K Partnership classroom, there are often times, approximately 20-25% of the time, children who qualify for child care subsidy but aren't poor enough to qualify for Pre-K. Both enrollments are necessary in order to make sure the partnership could braid the funding to cover all aspects of the child's day.

Pre-K partnerships are a benefit to all participants. School Districts are able to enroll children at an earlier age to provide academics and services to the children. Child care programs can also retain enrollment providing a consistency of care to child. Children and families benefit as the child has full day education and care to meet the families' working hours, not just during the public school hours.

The passage of HB1614 will allow a child who is eligible for child care subsidy and is enrolled in a Pre-K Partnership classroom will be automatically eligible for public school Pre-K allowing for the braiding of funding to happen.

Gratefully,

Kim Kofron, M.Ed.

kkofron@childrenatrisk.org

Cathy McHorse

United Way for Greater Austin

Austin, TX

Written Testimony FOR House Bill 1614 Submitted by United Way for Greater Austin Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Since 2019, the United Way for Greater Austin has served as a public Pre-K Partnership hub or intermediary. This has allowed high-quality child care centers to partner with Austin ISD to expand access to high-quality Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 seats in Travis County. This year we expanded to partner with Round Rock ISD to launch a Pre-K3 program. We partner with 18 centers supporting 23 Pre-K Partnership classrooms in total. Partnerships benefit children, working parents, child care programs, and school districts. Pre-K Partnerships offer increased choice for working families by providing high-quality Pre-K wraparound care for a full day with one drop-off and pick-up.

These partnerships also benefit the child care programs by maintaining enrollment in the preschool classrooms, which helps offset the higher costs of infant and toddler classrooms. School districts benefit from higher enrollment and more options for meeting the diverse needs of working families. The entire community benefits from improved school readiness by maximizing resources across early childhood settings. We serve as a hub because of the administrative complexity required for implementing partnerships. Hub staff support child care directors in determining if partnering is viable for their business based on the number of potentially eligible children to co-enroll - which needs to be sufficient to cover the additional costs of employing an appropriately credentialed teacher.

For Pre-K Partnerships to be viable financially, a sufficient number of students in a partnership classroom must be able to be dually enrolled in both subsidized child care and public Pre-K. The misalignment of income eligibility criteria for Pre-Kindergarten as based on Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility (185% of Federal Poverty Guidelines) and the income eligibility criteria for Child Care Subsidy as administered through TWC (85% of State Median Income) makes it challenging for some partnerships to dually enroll a sufficient number of students. We estimate 1 out of 4 students receiving Subsidy is not eligible for Public Pre-K. HB 1614 would allow for those 25% of children receiving Subsidy to qualify for public Pre-K, adding to co-enrollment counts and making partnerships more sustainable for child care providers.

A study by Philanthropy Advocates found that the differences in eligibility requirements between State Pre-K, Head-Start, and Child Care Subsidy was the most challenging barrier in existing Pre-K partnerships. One of the opportunities to reduce this complexity is to align eligibility as HB 1614 aims to do. Extending Pre-K eligibility to students who already qualify for Child Care Subsidy will help build momentum for partnerships with limited fiscal impact for the state. Streamlining eligibility will increase efficiency and benefit working families.

Madison Mattise

United Way for Greater Austin Pre-K Partnerships

Austin, TX

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in favor of House Bill 1614, sponsored by Representative Dutton. Since 2019, the United Way for Greater Austin has served as a public Pre-K Partnership hub or intermediary. This has allowed high-quality child care centers to partner with Austin ISD to expand access to high-quality Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 seats in Travis County. This year we expanded to partner with Round Rock ISD to launch a Pre-K3 program. We partner with 18 centers supporting 23 Pre-K Partnership classrooms in total. Partnerships benefit children, working parents, child care programs, and school districts. Pre-K Partnerships offer increased choice for working families by providing high-quality Pre-K with wraparound care for a full day with one drop-off and pick-up.

These partnerships also benefit the child care programs by maintaining enrollment in the preschool classrooms, which helps offset the higher costs of infant and toddler classrooms. School districts benefit from higher enrollment and more options for meeting the diverse needs of working families. The entire community benefits from improved school readiness by maximizing resources across early childhood settings.

We serve as a hub because of the administrative complexity required for implementing partnerships. Hub staff support child care directors in determining if partnering is viable for their business based on the number of potentially eligible children to co-enroll - which needs to be sufficient to cover the additional costs of employing an appropriately credentialed teacher.

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Susan Burek

Self: I am a Parent and an advocate for people with disabilities

Austin, TX

Thank you for allowing me to testify regarding HB 1614. My name is Sue Burek and I live in Austin, Texas. I'm a parent, an advocate for people with disabilities, and a member of several advocacy organizations that serve families with children with disabilities, including Texas Parent to Parent, Protect Texas Fragile Kids, and Loving Hearts for All.

I am testifying IN SUPPORT OF HB 1614, which adds free pre-kindergarten programs for additional populations, including children who are eligible for subsidized child-care services through the Texas Workforce Commission.

Please vote to APPROVE HB 1614. Thank you very much for your consideration of my request.

Trista Bishop-Watt  
Good Reason Houston  
Houston, TX

Early childhood learning is the foundation on which K-12 education builds, making high-quality prekindergarten programs imperative, especially for children who already face hardship. Good Reason Houston Supports the changes proposed by HB 1614 because it expands pre-K programming to more three-year-olds and coordinates eligibility thresholds for partnerships, easing the way for school districts to offer more options to families.

HB 1614 would expand pre-K offerings to high-need three-year-olds through partnerships with existing community-based child-care providers. These partnerships not only have the benefit of pre-K programming but often provide wrap-around care for hours outside of the traditional school day.

Considering the impact that early learning has on later student outcomes, this expansion would increase the number of students who are kindergarten ready, prioritizing children who need the most support. Partnerships would allow school districts an opportunity to provide this service and increase early learner enrollment without having to fully shoulder the responsibility of providing the necessary infrastructure. Further, partnerships reduce the financial burden on school districts and child-care providers alike by blending pre-K funding from school systems with Child Care Scholarships.

Current law encourages school districts to consider partnerships with community-based child-care providers before seeking a bond election for pre-K program infrastructure or establishing a new pre-K program. Despite this, the differences in eligibility thresholds for these programs have made partnerships difficult to navigate. For pre-K partnerships to be viable financially, around 10-12 students must be dually enrolled in both child care and public pre-K. However, estimates from existing partnership classrooms show that 1 out of 4 students receiving Child Care Scholarships are not also eligible for public pre-K with the eligibility requirements as written.

HB 1614 addresses this logistical misstep by clearly establishing public pre-K eligibility for students who are eligible for subsidized child-care services provided through the child-care services program administered by the Texas Workforce Commission.

Overall, HB 1614 provides more opportunities to reach children early who need educational support, adds additional flexibility for school districts, and removes administrative barriers that are currently preventing effective pre-K partnerships with community-based child-care programs.

Kate Hoffman  
The Commit Partnership  
Dallas, TX

With the passage of HB 3 (86R), Local Education Agencies were encouraged to expand pre-kindergarten options available to families. Instead of building new buildings for expanded Pre-K, HB 3 encouraged ISDs to partner with high-quality child care programs in their communities. These “Pre-K Partnerships” not only provide high-quality Pre-K programming but often serve children and working parents with wrap-around care for hours outside of the traditional school day by blending Pre-K funding from school systems with Child Care Scholarships.

Ultimately, Pre-K Partnerships save taxpayers money, can lessen the need for school bonds, support kindergarten readiness, and open up more options for working parents and employers. As currently structured, unfortunately, bureaucratic hurdles and slightly different eligibility thresholds have made partnerships logistically difficult at the community level. For Pre-K Partnerships to be viable financially, a sufficient number of students in a partnership classroom must be dually enrolled in both child care and public Pre-K. The misalignment between income eligibility criteria for Pre-K and Child Care Scholarships often makes this challenging, acts as a disincentive for both child care and LEAs alike to establish new partnerships and sustain existing ones, and hinders Texas’ ability to scale high-quality Pre-K offerings.

As the House Public Education Committee discusses how to follow through on the commitments made in HB 3 to expand high-quality Pre-K programming in the state, HB 1614 would help alleviate this pressing challenge. Its provision to streamline income eligibility criteria for Child Care Scholarships and free Pre-K in partnership settings (e.g., extending Pre-K eligibility to students who already qualify for Child Care Scholarships) will help build momentum for partnerships with limited fiscal impact for the state. Ultimately, this small but meaningful change will allow more students and working families to benefit from high-quality early learning programs that meet their needs.

Additional signatories: Children at Risk, Success by 6, Child Care Associates, Early Matters, Texans Care for Children, Philanthropy Advocates, TXAEYC, North Texas Early Education Alliance, Pre-K 4 SA, ChildCareGroup

Thomas Hedrick  
Self  
Austin, TX

I am a private investor in Austin and recognize the importance of getting kids off to great starts. I am in support of HB 1614. Thank you all for your service.

Marcus Brooks  
Self/Business Owner  
Garland, TX

FOR

Maria Nicholas  
Eagle Forum  
Farmers Branch TX, TX

Please support HB 900

Robbi Cooper  
Self  
Austin, TX

I support ending 3Qing Texas can do it and students deserve this change. I am a parent of a student with dyslexia and I also support including or acknowledging or incorporating dyslexia screening in this bill. I also hope that this bill would recognize and have an alert mechanism to allow for IDEA Child Find and parents rights to seek a full evaluation for Special Education. I hope to see this bill pass with more acknowledgment of reading disabilities which need additional supports. I am very encouraged to end 3Qing - Texas students deserve better and we have the science and knowledge to do so.

Tania Vazquez, Ms.  
Self, Caregiver/Mother  
Weatherford, TX

Please protect our children from sexually explicit material in school.

Margie Frasier  
Central Texas Tea Party  
Temple, TX

I am against bringing children to school at such young ages. Children need instruction and wisdom from their parents. Not more indoctrination from grownups who don't have their best interests in mind. This is a bill that needs to be scrapped. A better idea is how do we make it easier for moms to be home with their children till they are at least 6 years of age. The majority of parents would like to raise their young children. But government has grown so big, it takes the income of two parents to just meet the bills every month. So try getting together and helping parents to be there for their children, not both working while government pays others to take care of them.

Amy Mazeika  
Self  
San Antonio, TX  
Against