

Testimony
House Bill 1466 – Department of Human Services
House Human Services Committee
Representative Robin Weisz, Chairman
February 3, 2021

Chairman Weisz, members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Jessica Thomasson, Executive Policy Director for the Department of Human Services (Department). I am here today to register the Department's support for House Bill 1466.

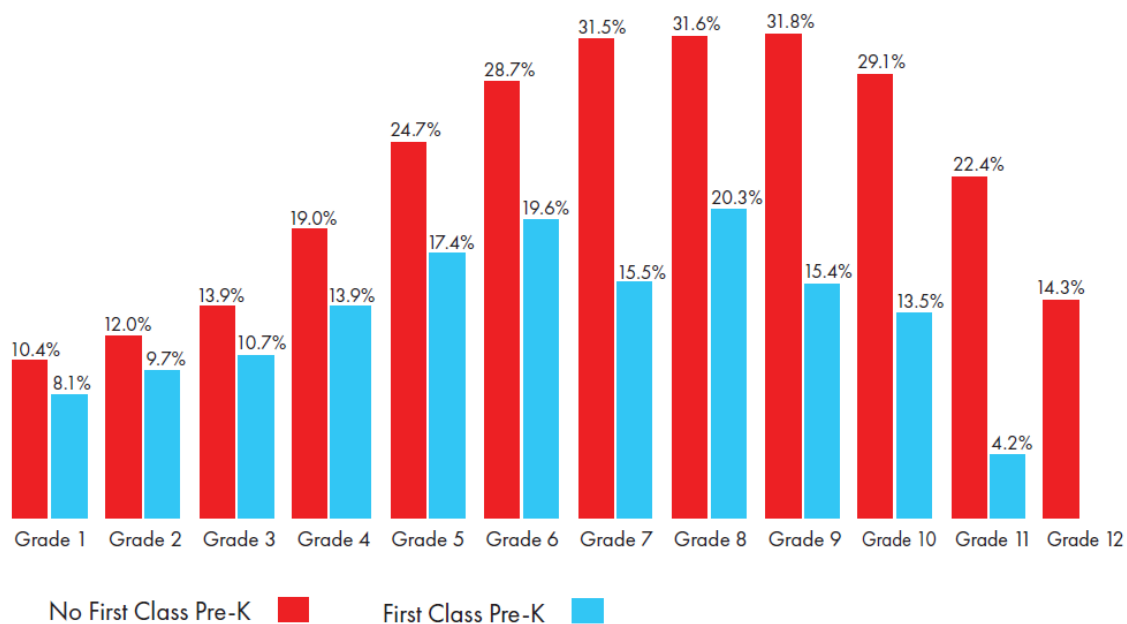
The Department of Human Services is working across systems whenever possible to improve stability and prevent crises, to promote and support recovery and well-being, to support workforce needs with access to childcare, and to align programs for maximum return on investment. We recognize that any investments we make in support of young families and in children's earliest years are both cost and outcome effective.

HB1466 proposes an investment in expanded access to quality early childhood experiences for children across our state. The "Best-in-Class Four-Year-Old Program" grants could support a wide range of stakeholders who are committed to providing quality early childhood experiences to young children who have not yet entered kindergarten. The proposal builds on years of proven results, as documented by dozens of research and evaluation efforts conducted on similar programs in other states, for which the driving question has been to determine whether or not investments in high quality early childhood experiences return positive outcomes that persist as children grow.

As an example, the Alabama First Class Pre-K program, in an issue brief published in July 2019, reported that the percentage of students who had disciplinary infractions in grades K-12 was consistently lower for

children who participated in the First Class Pre-K program, as compared to children who had not. And most notably, the impact was persistent over time.

Chart 2: Percent of Students with Infractions: 2014-2015 School Year



Source:

Adams J, Becker D, Ernest J, Fifolt M, Johnson H, Ross J, Sen B, Strichik T & Preskitt J. (2019) Disciplinary Infractions in Alabama Public Schools: First-Class Pre-K Students Have Lower Discipline Rates. [Research Issue Brief] University of Alabama Birmingham School of Public Health. University of Alabama Birmingham School of Education. Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama. Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education.

While I won't take your time today to review the literature that is available on this topic, I can say that the program proposed in HB1466 is modeled to incorporate key elements of initiatives that deliver results.

The grant program, as it is proposed, takes steps to ensure that stakeholders that participate in the program diligently follow quality standards, that they are inclusive of children with a range of developmental and behavioral needs, and that they are available to families across the income spectrum. HB1466 provides ongoing, individualized coaching for

participating programs, to help support the work that needs to be done at the individual adult-to-child level in each program.

At DHS our approach is based on the knowledge that children are best able to realize their potential if they have access to quality early childhood experiences. And we know that investing in early childhood supports state workforce needs because parents are more able to productively engage in the workforce when they know their children are well.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.