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Nan Rich earns early child care award

Nan Rich is a fighter for children, and as a state senator, she arms herself with persistence and compassion.

In her four years in the Legislature, Rich, a Democrat from Weston, has been one of loudest voices on behalf of children. Her commitment to early education and child care has earned her the Children's Forum Legislative Award. The nonprofit Children's Forum gives the award annually to one House and one Senate leader who supports bills or legislation intended to improve early child care.

"She's more than a caring person. She's more of a warrior to this mission," said Ellyn Okrent, executive vice president for Kids in Distress, an organization that works with abused and neglected children. Rich sits on the group's board of directors.

"Nan has taken on the task of meeting their needs through her interests and through her work in the Legislature," Okrent said.

In the Senate, Rich has tried to improve the state's volunteer pre-kindergarten, approved in 2002, when voters passed a constitutional amendment to establish a "high-quality," free, universal pre-kindergarten program for all four-year-old children.

Rich has proposed legislation to improve the program by creating a state "Office of Early Learning" to streamline to coordinate pre-kindergarten education.

"Pre-K just as important, if not more so, than the other grades," said Rich, who also sits on the Children, Families and Elder affairs committee. "It gives children the foundation by which they can learn and succeed from that point forward."

Rich has been a children's advocate since 1985 when she helped launch the nonprofit Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters Program. The program tries to "teach mothers to be the first educator of their children," said Rich, who serves as the group's president.

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