



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

rikids@rikidscount.org
www.rikidscount.org

**Testimony Re: An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government —
Office of Health and Human Services
Senate Finance Committee
May 4, 2023
Kelsey Bala, Policy Analyst**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We would also like to thank Senator DiPalma for sponsoring this important bill, and Senators Miller, Lauria, and Murray for cosponsoring.

The home and community-based provider workforce provides critical supports to the most vulnerable children and families in our state, and it is important that provider agencies are adequately funded and staffed to ensure that families are supported and children are safe.

The home and community-based provider workforce is in a state of crisis due to underfunding caused by a failure to ensure rates paid to community providers keep pace with the cost of providing services. For the first time in decades, community providers have vulnerable children on waitlists delaying services due to staffing issues and turnover. This has placed our children, youth, and families who are in desperate need of services at an unacceptable disadvantage. For example, Tides Family Services, which provides critical community-based child welfare, juvenile justice and behavioral health programs for children and families throughout the state, needed to institute a waitlist for the first time in 40 years due to staffing issues and turnover. It takes a strong system of services and supports to have the array of services families need. Being unable to accept new families into services puts the entire child welfare system at risk of collapse due to these workforce challenges.

Currently, the Governor's FY 2024 budget includes \$7.8 million to accommodate a rate increase expected to result from the expiration of current contracts with DCYF's placement (foster care and congregate care) and community-based providers, which are set to expire by July 1, 2023. However, these funds will not be enough to cover the costs of wage stabilization or meet other program needs. We are thankful that the General Assembly increased rates for community providers last session, and we urge that sustainable funding be prioritized. Current budgets for placement and community-based providers are dated and do not reflect current demand. Since these vital programs had not received rate adjustments for so long, the rate enhancements brought programs to a baseline level of sustainability.

We urge that sufficient additional funding be allocated to continue critical workforce stabilization after ARPA funds are no longer available after June 30, 2023. **We believe an investment in this workforce will**

bring stability to the home and community-based service array available to children and families in Rhode Island.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.