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Testimony Re: Article 10, Section 5, the Child Care Assistance Program

Senate Finance Committee

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Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Section 5 of Article 10 to increase the rates for preschoolers (children ages 3 to 5) in the Child Care Assistance Program who are enrolled in child care centers.** Last year, the General Assembly took a significant step forward by increasing and establishing tiered quality rates for child care centers serving children under age 6, funded with \$3.6 million in federal resources available through the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

In July 2018, child care centers serving infants received up to a 33% increase in rates and centers serving preschoolers received up to a 21% increase in rates. The rate for infants and toddlers in 5-star centers now meets the federal benchmark for equal access to quality, the 75th percentile of a recent market rates study.

However, rates for preschool children in centers still do not meet the federal benchmark. CCAP rates for preschool children in 5-star centers are currently \$195.67/week while the federal benchmark for equal access to quality is \$230.00/week. The Governor's proposal will get programs closer to the federal benchmark but still not reach it. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT recommends the rate plan in Representative Diaz and Senator Crowley's bills (H-5106 and S-282) which would increase the rate for preschoolers in 5-star centers to meet the federal benchmark** and also include adoption of tiered quality rates for school-age children. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also supports the tiered quality rates plan for family child care providers in Article 15.

We strongly agree with the Governor Raimondo's proposal to remove the requirement inserted during Governor Carcieri's administration which prohibits state payment rates that exceed fees charged to private paying families. This requirement means that programs must raise the fees for all families in order to pull in the higher payments from the state to support quality.

The BrightStars Quality Rating and Improvement System has been designed to fairly and accurately measure the quality of child care and early learning programs. As of January 2019, 78% of the licensed child care centers in the state have a BrightStars rating and all programs that serve children in the Child Care Assistance Program have a rating. Currently, there are 77 centers that have a 1-star rating, 74 that have a 2-star rating, 31 that have a 3-star rating, 52 that have a 4-star rating, and 13 that have a 5-star rating.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.