



Testimony Re: H-7426 An Act Relating to Education- The Education Equity Act

House Committee on Health, Education, and Welfare

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Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Chairman McNamara, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks you for your strong leadership to ensure that children from low-income families have access to high quality early childhood education. As you have said many times, this is a critical strategy for closing achievement gaps and improving education outcomes. We are here to testify in support of your bill, H-7426, the Education Equity Act which supports efforts to improve access to high-quality early childhood education programs for children under age four. We know that many young children, particularly those living with low-income families and those who are young English Language Learners, do not have opportunities to enroll in high-quality early learning programs and thus, many experience a preparation gap that is evident at kindergarten entry.

We applaud your leadership to ensure that more low income children gain the benefit of high quality early childhood education programs and we would like to make the following two recommendations regarding H-7426 and will be happy to provide language for your consideration:

1) Require Cross-Departmental Planning

The plan called for in this bill -- to improve access to high-quality early learning programs for low-income children under age four -- should involve all relevant state departments, specifically the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, the Rhode Island Department of Health, the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, and the Early Intervention program which is managed by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

This cross-departmental plan could be incorporated into the work of the recently reconstituted Children’s Cabinet and informed by the Rhode Island Early Learning Council and the Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care.

2) Build on Existing Infrastructure

The cross-departmental plan to expand access to high-quality early learning programs for low-income infants and toddlers should include recommendations to expand eligibility, reduce waiting lists, and/or improve the quality of existing programs for young children:

Base of Existing Early Learning Program for Children Under Age 4	State Agency	Children Under Age 4 Enrolled*
Early Head Start & Head Start	DHS	1,432
Evidence-Based Home Visiting	DOH	823
Child Care Assistance Program	DHS	3,558
Early Intervention	EOHHS	2,195

* Children may be enrolled in more than one program (e.g. 12% of children in Early Head Start have a developmental delay or disability and are also enrolled in Early Intervention)

[Note: There are approximately 20,400 low-income (under 200% FPL) children under age four in Rhode Island].

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman for your strong leadership to ensure high quality early learning opportunities for our youngest children, especially for those who lack access to high quality early childhood education. The earlier we start, the better the outcomes for children.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.