



**Testimony Re: S-2680 Relating to Education – Rhode Island  
Prekindergarten Education Act  
Senate Education Committee  
March 30, 2022  
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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports S-2680**, which codifies in statute key elements of the RI Pre-K program, which was designed in response to the General Assembly's passage of the Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Act in 2008, launched in 2009 as a small pilot program, and has been expanded over time. The bill also establishes goals to dramatically expand the program so all children ages 3 and 4 can participate.

We strongly support the language in the bill that clearly indicates that the RI Pre-K expansion will continue to meet nationally-recognized, research-based, high-quality standards and that RI Pre-K expansion will continue to be delivered through a diverse delivery system including community-based child care centers, Head Start programs, and public school districts.

We propose the following suggestions to strengthen the bill:

**1) Add language in statute that specifies that the RI Pre-K program expansion and existing classrooms will receive sufficient funding and will be required to provide compensation equal to the compensation of teachers in the public school setting.** Competitive teacher pay is an essential element of the RI Pre-K program design, regardless of setting, and should be put into statute.

The 2008-2009 RI Pre-K Design team reached consensus that RI Pre-K teachers would be paid on the public school teacher salary scale, regardless of setting. See page 10 of the 2009 RI Pre-K Planning Group Report: "All Pre-K teachers with Early Childhood Teacher Certification and early childhood qualified teaching assistants in state-funded Pre-K demonstration classrooms will be paid on the same salary scale as local public school teachers and teachers' assistants. Both public and community-based programs will be required to pay qualified staff working in state-funded Pre-K classrooms according to the scale."

**2) Add language in statute that specifying investments that will be made to strength access to high-quality infant and toddler early care and education program, by requiring a 33% infant/toddler child care set aside** to the section that references that says expanding pre-Kindergarten will not disrupt the stability of infant and toddler care throughout the state." For example, if the state invests \$10 million in RI Pre-K expansion for three and four year olds, they would also invest \$3.3 million to improve access to high-quality child care for children under age three. Access to high-quality infant and toddler child care is currently very limited in Rhode Island. **Without a significant investment of funds, it will not be possible to avoid continued disruption and decline in access to affordable, high-quality infant and toddler care.** Rhode Island can refer to the [Illinois's infant-toddler set aside](#) that is built into their preschool expansion plan. We recommend allocating infant/toddler set-aside resources to increasing access to high-quality child care for infants and toddlers through contracts

with high-quality child care programs (centers and family child care), increasing the compensation of skilled and qualified infant/toddler educators in child care programs, investing in Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships as well as increasing rates, expanding eligibility, and improving payment practices for the Child Care Assistance Program.

**3) Add language in statute to develop and fund systems that will allow high-quality, licensed family child care providers to deliver RI Pre-K,** through staffed family child care networks and other strategies. Family child care programs are included in federal planning efforts to expand Pre-K and should be included in Rhode Island's plans. Head Start programs across the country partner with family child care programs to deliver high-quality preschool. [And about half of the state-funded Pre-K programs in the U.S., include family child care providers in their delivery model.](#)

Rhode Island is a leader in the nation by meeting all 10 of the National Institute for Early Education Research's quality benchmarks, and we have a very strong diverse delivery model with strong community-based child care providers, Head Start programs, and public schools participating.

We are eager to see our RI Pre-K program expand and provide more children with high-quality early learning opportunities as part of a strong Birth through Grade 3 early education and care system.