



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

Testimony Re: H-5200, RIDE Budget, RI Pre-K funding
 Senate Finance Committee
 March 8, 2022
 Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign **support the Governor’s proposal to allocate \$7 million in new state general revenue to prevent the closure of 40 RI Pre-K classrooms serving 4-year-olds.**

[This funding will replace \\$7 million in annual federal PDG B-5 funding that has been used to support the operation of these classrooms.](#) If state funding is not allocated, preschool teachers and teaching assistants will be laid off, classroom materials and equipment will have to be put in storage, and the state will lose 800 high-quality preschool seats for four-year-olds while we are developing plans to provide universal preschool for all children ages three and four.

We would also like to request that the General Assembly add additional state funding (estimated at \$6.5 million) in the FY24 budget to layer over federal funding to maintain all high-quality Head Start preschool classrooms for children ages three and four (30 classrooms are at risk of permanent closure this summer) or any Early Head Start classrooms for children under age three (11 classrooms are at risk of permanent closure) with qualified educators.

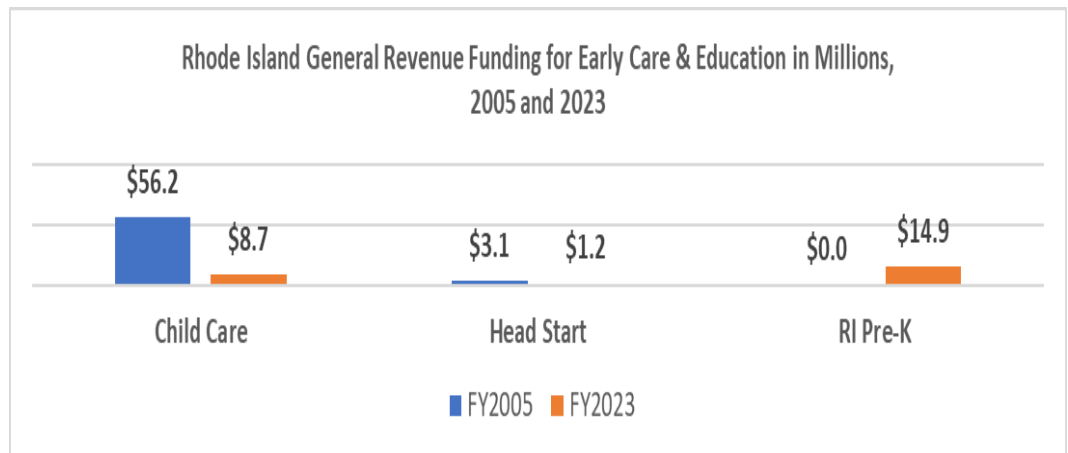
Due to the nationwide staffing crisis in early care and education, the federal [Office of Head Start is allowing local programs to request a permanent reduction in funded enrollment without reducing federal funds](#) so that resources can be directed to increasing wages to ensure stable, qualified teachers can be retained in remaining classrooms. Losing these classrooms permanently will be a devastating loss to children and families statewide.

Region	Closed Head Start Classrooms	Closed Early Head Start Classrooms	Eligible Children Waiting
Greater Providence: Central Falls, Cumberland, Lincoln, Providence Pawtucket	16	3	225
Cranston	4	0	30
East Bay (Jamestown to East Providence)	3	4	112

Kent County: Coventry, East Greenwich, Warwick, West Greenwich, West Warwick	4	3	8
Northwest RI and South County	1	1	44
Woonsocket	2	N/A	20
TOTAL	30	11	439

Massachusetts provides \$16 million/year in state funding for Head Start and Early Head Start as part of its plan to provide high-quality preschool and early learning options for young children. This funding is layered over federal funds so that Massachusetts Head Start programs can provide competitive wages to attract and retain effective teachers. Rhode Island has a long history of investing state funds in Head Start (contracts managed by DHS), but this funding was cut by 60% in 2008 and has never been restored.

Rhode Island has disinvested from child care and from Head Start, while increasing investments in RI Pre-K. We need to invest resources across the entire early childhood system. Otherwise, when we increase access and quality in one sector, we will end up decreasing quality and access in another related sector. Achieving universal access to high-quality preschool and maintaining access to high-quality infant and toddler programs will take sustained, significant investments in our early learning system, including RI Pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start.



We thank the Governor for his proposal to allocate funds to prevent the closure of RI Pre-K classrooms, and we request additional funds to prevent permanent loss of Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.