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Testimony Re: Budget Article 12, Section 8, Medicaid Reform

House Finance Committee

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As a leader of the **Right from the Start Campaign**, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports the allocation of new funding to extend Medicaid to cover **community-based doula services** and **additional family home visiting programs and visits**.

My colleague, Katie Orona is testifying today in support **Article 12, Section 8d** of Medicaid coverage for perinatal doula services and in support of Rep. Ranglin-Vassell's bill. I will focus more **Article 12, Section 8j and 8k** on the need to increase and expand Medicaid funding for family home visiting programs in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island's **First Connections** program is an essential part of our state's system to support families with newborns and young infants and to connect them to programs that will help their children thrive – such as Early Intervention, Early Head Start, other high-quality evidence-based family home visiting programs, lactation support, mental health screenings and services, and resources to meet basic needs such as WIC and housing assistance. In 2019 in Rhode Island, 2,235 families with new babies received at least one First Connections visit, 23% of the families who gave birth. **Adding prenatal visits will help families get help sooner** so families can be on more stable footing when they bring their babies home from the hospital.

Over the last decade, Rhode Island, like many states, has developed a system of evidence-based family home visiting programs using federal funds. These national model programs – **Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers** – have all been rigorously evaluated and are proven to improve both child and parent outcomes. They serve families at home and develop deep, strong relationships with parents, helping them overcome daily challenges and make progress in developing economic security and parenting skills. These long-term, comprehensive family home visiting programs reduce child maltreatment, improve children's school readiness, promote and support parent education and employment, and strengthen maternal and child health.

Rhode Island has been providing limited Medicaid coverage for only three visits for the Healthy Families America and Nurse-Family Partnership programs. **We need to extend the number of family home visits covered by Medicaid** to cover the entire length of the programs. We support the plan to **add Parents as Teachers** onto the list of evidence-based programs covered by Medicaid. We also need to **increase the Medicaid rates** paid for home visits so that the non-profit agencies that operate these programs are more financially stable and can offer more

competitive wages to attract and retain highly skilled family visitors. Family home visitor are almost entirely women and approximately two-thirds are women of color. Wages are low because funding is not adequate. **Raising wages is necessary to keep highly skilled, consistent staff so that the state can realize the improved outcomes for children and families** that are associated with these national model programs.

In 2016, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the **Rhode Island Family Home Visiting Act** to establish this system of evidence-based programs managed by the Rhode Island Department of Health. In 2017, the General Assembly further amended the law to **require the state to appropriate necessary funds to expand these proven programs** so they are available for all pregnant and parenting families who would benefit.

Article 12 Section 8c Silver Diamine Fluoride: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Medicaid coverage for dental caries (cavity) treatments using Silver Diamine Fluoride. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommend SDF for children, adolescents, and patients with developmental delays. The application is low-cost, takes less than a minute and does not require the removal of carious tissue, eliminating the need for needles and anesthesia.

Article 12 Section 8e Community Health Workers: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Medicaid coverage for Community Health Workers who provide care management services that connect patients with services in their communities. CHWs are widely used in other states and provide a valuable bridge between the community and medical system.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. We urge the General Assembly to approve Medicaid funding for these important programs and services.