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Testimony Re: H-7123, Article 1, Section 16
Child Care Support
Senate Finance Committee
March 29, 2022
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that will help families with young children.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign **support the Governor's proposals in Article 1, section 16 of his FY23 budget proposal to invest in the child care and early education workforce.**

His budget proposal would:

- Allocate \$18.7 million in American Rescue Plan Act state fiscal recover funds to provide a **second year of \$3,000/year retention bonuses for over 6,000 educators** and direct care staff at licensed child care centers and family child care homes (approximately \$18.7 million).
- Allocate \$2 million to expand **Rhode Island's T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood workforce development model**. Since 2010, the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program has been helping child care educators in Rhode Island earn credentials and complete college degrees at the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island. T.E.A.C.H. is a nationally recognized, evidence-based model for supporting early educators in accessing higher education and reducing staff turnover in child care.
- **Include \$1 million to develop an early educator workforce registry, a critical piece of data infrastructure** needed to share information and opportunities directly with early educators, understand and address the needs of this essential workforce, and track improvements in staff recruitment, retention, and turnover over time. There are at least 37 states that have a statewide early educator registry
- **Allocate \$1 million for quality improvement grants** to help child care and early learning programs increase their BrightStars quality rating.
- **Provide a second year of funding (\$300,000) for family child care startup grants and technical assistance to recruit and open up to 100 additional family child care homes in the state.**

We have aligned proposals in **S-2235, Senator Cano's Early Educator Investment Act** and we have some suggestions for the **General Assembly** as you consider the Governor's proposals.

- Low wages and high staff turnover have been a major problem in the child care field for decades. The pandemic has made these problems more visible. We need to build the infrastructure now for something that we can continue into the future to help child care programs keep skilled staff. There are at least 15 states that have implemented a wage supplement as a strategy to help keep skilled and qualified early educators working in child care programs that have helped them earn credentials and college degrees in child development and early education. Some states have been providing wage supplements since the 1990s. **We should adapt and implement the Child Care WAGE\$ national model so we can build on the lessons learned by other states, avoid mistakes, and track successes. We ask you to consider implementing a tiered wage supplement program reduces child care staff turnover by allocating \$5 million of ARPA funds for a pilot Child Care WAGE\$ program as detailed in the Early Educator Investment Act.** It is particularly important to provide robust wage supplements to educators with credentials and degrees. The Child Care WAGE\$ model, was designed and is supported by the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood national network to improve compensation so we can keep people working in child care programs after they have built their skills and earned credentials/degrees. The Child Care WAGE\$ model is
- The investments in expanding T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood are very much needed. **[The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program has been successfully operating in Rhode Island for 10 years](#)** and has helped many early educators earn degrees and credentials.
- The investment in developing and implementing a statewide early educator registry is also very much needed (37 other states have one!) but we should proceed strategically and with caution. Rhode Island attempted to build an early educator registry a few years ago with Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge funds, but it was not implemented successfully and has not been maintained. **We should learn from other states that have built successful early educator registries, including Pennsylvania and other states in the National Workforce Registry Alliance.** There are several products on the market that other states have worked with vendors to build and that can be purchased, customized, and implemented quickly with support from experts.
- **Investments in family child care are needed, but until we fix how we finance child care, it will be difficult to recruit skilled people to enter this field and even more difficult to keep programs open over the years.** With low rates and low enrollment, it is very difficult to earn even minimum wage as a family child care provider. **[The number of family child care homes in Rhode Island and in the U.S. has been declining for many years. We have 63% fewer programs than we did in 2006](#)** because it is just very hard to make a living as a family child care provider. We would recommend investing in our current family child care providers by establishing staffed family child care networks, a model proven to stabilize and improve the quality of family child care and by investing in strengthening our Child Care Assistance Program.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. We applaud the Governor for his proposal and for recognizing the need to invest in the child care and early educator workforce so we can have a stable, high-quality child care and early learning system that families can rely on and that provides high-quality learning experiences for children.

Rhode Island Needs a

WAGE SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

to help child care programs retain qualified and effective educators

Currently, child care educators do not earn enough to make a decent wage

Child Care Educator
\$12.01/HR

Preschool Educator
\$13.80/HR

Center Director **\$24.32/HR**

Kindergarten Teacher

Wage supplement programs help
CLOSE THE GAP

\$46.76/HR



66%

of Rhode Island child care educators plan to leave their job if their salary does not improve

Low compensation levels make it difficult to recruit a sufficient pipeline of educators and to retain or develop skilled educators to provide high-quality care with enriching learning opportunities for children.

At least **15 STATES** fund wage supplement programs for child care educators



Some states have had a wage supplement for **20+ years**

What Does a **WAGE SUPPLEMENT** Look Like?

