



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

**Testimony Re: Article 14, Section 5, Relating to Medical Assistance –
First Connection Family Home Visiting Program**

House Finance Committee

July 30, 2020

Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **As a leader of the Right from the Start Campaign, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports Article 15, Section 5 and Governor Raimondo’s budget amendment to allow Medicaid coverage for prenatal visits conducted by the First Connections Family Home Visiting Program.** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports the Governor’s proposal to invest \$378,000 in new state funding to cover these costs and to invest \$678,000 in new state funding to cover evidence-based family home visiting services known to improve child and parent outcomes.

In 2019, approximately one quarter of Rhode Island’s newborns (2,235) – from almost every city and town in Rhode Island -- received at least one First Connections home visit. First Connections is designed to help families get connected to needed resources like Early Intervention, maternal depression evaluation and treatment, and the WIC nutrition program. **During the COVID-19 crisis, First Connections has been a lifeline for families** who have been staying at home to protect the health of vulnerable infants.

Medicaid funding is needed to enable this program to meet the needs of pregnant women. Many families experience significant economic, health, and safety challenges when they are expecting a child. Research shows that the earlier families receive help, the better they are able to overcome challenges.

Medicaid funding is also needed to support services of Rhode Island’s evidence-based family home visiting programs – Healthy Families America and Nurse Family Partnership. These long-term programs are proven to improve parenting practices, family economic security, and children’s school readiness. These programs are also some of the only interventions known to reduce the incidence of child maltreatment.

Both First Connections and the evidence-based family home visiting programs complement the delivery of community-based doula services, which we also support (see testimony from Katie Orona). Rhode Island KIDS COUNT urges support for Governor Raimondo’s proposal to invest \$378,000 in state funding to expand First Connections and \$678,000 to sustain evidence-based family home visiting through a Medicaid match.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Medicaid coverage for First Connections prenatal visits.