



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

Testimony Re: Department of Human Services Budget

House Finance Committee

July 30, 2020

Leanne Barrett and Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analysts

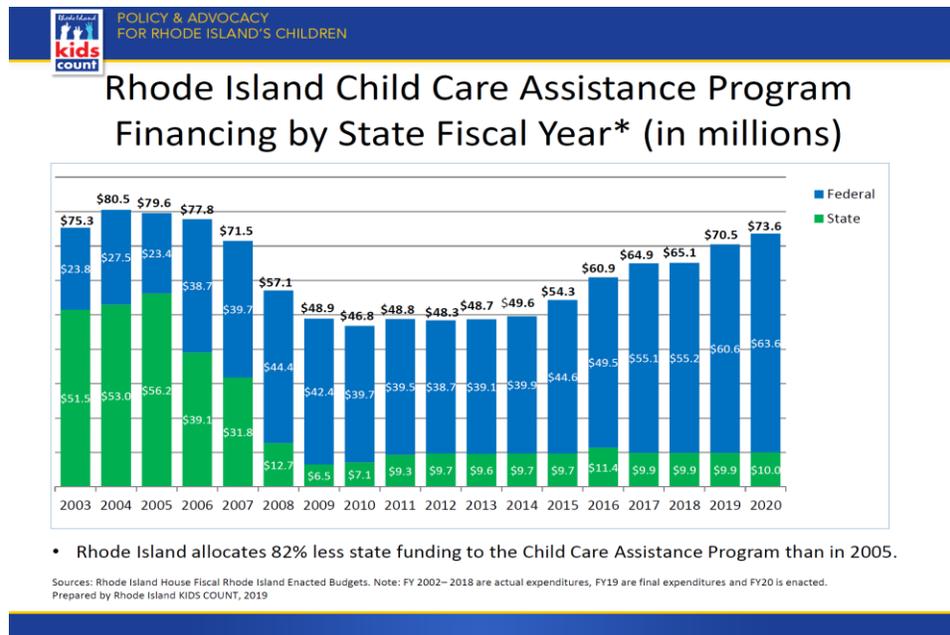
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

As a leader of the Right from the Start Campaign, **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports Governor Raimondo’s proposal to invest \$3.9 million of state funds to increase Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) rates** paid to child care centers serving low-income working families and to **sustain the \$1.2 million in state funding for Head Start** which provides access to high-quality early learning and comprehensive family support services for 130 of our lowest income children.

Child Care Assistance Program

The rates for CCAP are set in statute and Rhode Island is not in compliance with the equal access provision of the 2014 federal Child Care and Development Block Grant Act. In February 2019, the state received notification that rates for the Child Care Assistance Program remain substantially below the equal access standard that is designed to ensure low-income families have equal access to the child care market.

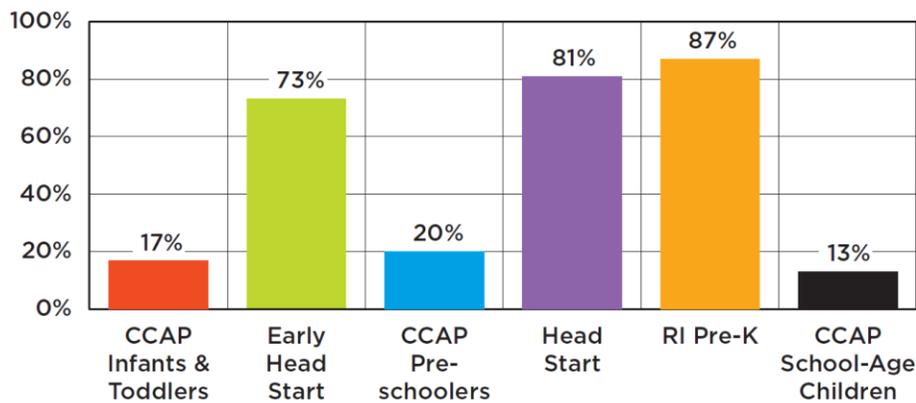
Rhode Island allocates \$45 million less in state funding for child care than we did in 2005. State funding for child care has not been restored since cuts were made during the Great Recession. All new federal money has been going to make up for state cuts, which means child care programs have been struggling to meet quality standards, and many families who cannot afford child care on their own are not eligible for the subsidy.



Families need access to affordable, high-quality child care so parents can work and their children can thrive. **Low state rates impact the quality of care available for all families in the child care program.**

Largely because of better funding levels and more stable, qualified, and effective educators on staff, children who are enrolled in Head Start or RI Pre-K are much more likely to be in a high-quality program – 81% of children in Head Start and 87% in RI Pre-K are in a high-quality program (with a 4- or 5-star rating) compared with only 13-20% of children receiving a CCAP subsidy. Hourly per child funding rates for Head Start and Pre-K are more than twice the hourly per child funding for child care.

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN HIGH-QUALITY PROGRAMS (4 OR 5 STARS), RHODE ISLAND, 2019-2020



Source: CCAP data from Rhode Island Department of Human Services, December 2019; Early Head Start and Head Start data from Rhode Island Head Start programs, October 2019; RI Pre-K data from Rhode Island Department of Education, October 2019. Note: licensed family child care slots were evenly divided across age groups, estimated at 33% infants and toddlers, 33% preschoolers, and 33% school-age children.

The temporary rate increases that DHS instituted in June are set to expire on August 28 and are very important and should be preserved. Increasing child care rates will help programs meet critical CDC health and safety standards and attract and retain staff that can meet children’s educational and social-emotional needs during the pandemic and beyond.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT urges support for Governor Raimondo’s proposal to invest \$3.9 million in state funding in child care, and we also advocate for restoration of sustainable state funding to meet and exceed federal standards for child care rates.

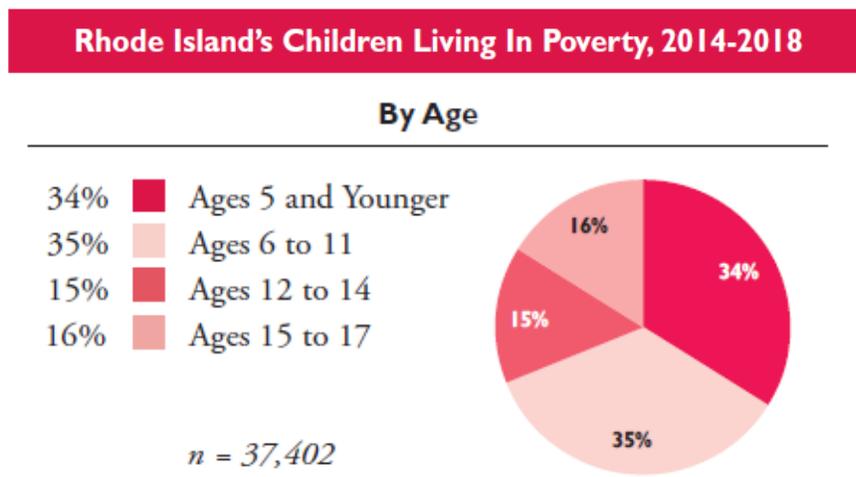
Rhode Island Works Program

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports the proposed changes to the **Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works) supported by The Raising RI Coalition**, a group of community, healthcare, social service and advocacy organizations that serve low-income families and are working to ensure that families can meet their basic needs. These proposed changes would expand the children’s clothing allowance to infants and toddlers

and would incrementally increase the RI Works monthly benefit from 30% to 50% of the Federal Poverty Level within two years.

RI Works helps very low-income families meet their basic needs by providing cash assistance and work supports, including employment services, SNAP benefits, health insurance and subsidized child care. In December 2019, there were 2,579 adults and 6,884 children under age 18 enrolled in RI Works. Almost three-quarters (73%) of RI Works beneficiaries were children.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT **supports the increase of the annual children’s clothing allowance** for school-aged children from \$30 to \$100. We also encourage the committee to consider the statutory change proposed by the Raising RI Coalition that would permit the Rhode Island Department of Human Services to provide the annual clothing allowance to all children, including infants and toddlers. In December 2019, 42% of the children enrolled in RI Works were under the age of six. Including these children in the clothing allowance would provide relief to families living in deep poverty.



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also strongly supports the proposed incremental **increase of the RI Works benefit** from 31% of the federal poverty level (\$554 for a family of 3) to 50% (\$905) within two years. The current benefit amount provides \$6 per person per day and has not been increased in almost 30 years. Rhode Island is the only New England state that has not raised the monthly benefit during those 30 years.

The loss of employment in low-income households due to COVID-19 is expected to impact economic mobility and have devastating long-lasting effects on children in poverty. We urge the committee to consider raising the monthly benefit to help very low-income families meet their basic needs and to continue to receive important work supports including employment services and subsidized child care.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of increasing state funding for the Child Care Assistance Program, raising CCAP rates in statute to meet the federal equal access standard, sustaining state funding for Head Start, and increasing cash assistance support for RI Works families.