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Testimony Re: H-7283, Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act

House Finance Committee

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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 strongly support passage of the Early Educator Investment Act, H-7283 to address the compensation and staffing crises in community-based early childhood programs funded and overseen by four different departments – child care (DHS), Early Intervention (EOHHS), RI Pre-K (RIDE), and Family Home Visiting (DOH)

High-quality early childhood programs have consistent, **effective educators to adequately staff programs so families can use them and to support early child development and learning.**

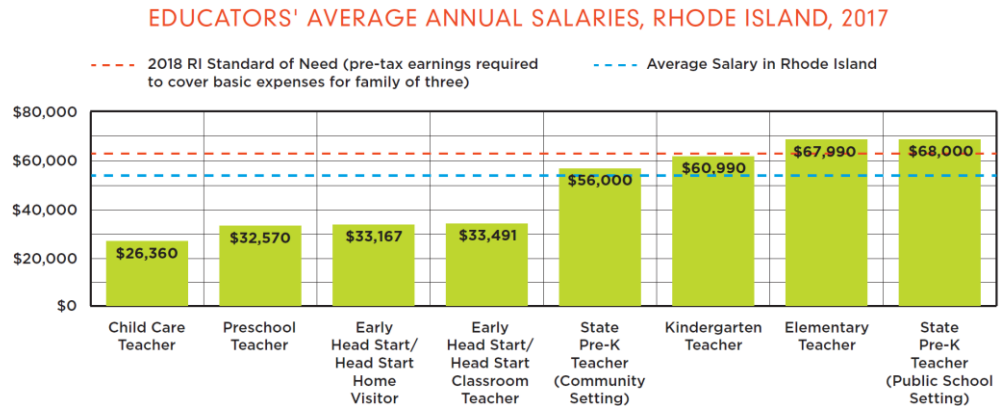
Low wages and unstable staffing create great challenges in delivering high-quality services to children and families and limits family access to services they need.

- Child care programs have significant challenges attracting and retaining effective educators, which results in **empty classrooms and waiting lists for families.**
- Early Intervention, a public education program required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to serve infants and toddlers with developmental challenges, **has a statewide waiting list** because they have difficulty attracting and retaining staff with non-competitive wages.
- RI Pre-K classrooms in community-based settings **lose teachers to higher paying jobs in public school districts**, creating challenges for programs that meet the needs of working families.
- Family Home Visiting programs **often must suspend enrollment when staff resign.**

The Early Educator Investment Act requires the Children's Cabinet to **develop a cross-departmental target wage scale for early educators**, including professionals who work in child care programs (both centers and family child care) licensed and funded through the Child Care Assistance Program by the RI Department of Human Services, RI Pre-K overseen and funded by the RI Department of Education, family home visiting programs overseen and funded by the RI Department of Health, and Early Intervention programs overseen and funded by the RI Executive Office of Health and

Human Services. The bill asks the state to consider the wage scale developed by the **Rhode Island Moving the Needle on Compensation Task Force (see attached)**, which estimated wage targets for early educators that are comparable to similarly qualified public-school educators.

The bill also requires the state to **design strategies and estimate the cost to close the gap between current wages and the target wage scale.**



Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). May 2017 state occupational employment and wage estimates. Retrieved August 30, 2019, from www.bls.gov. Head Start Program Information Report - 2017 summary report - Rhode Island. Retrieved August 30, 2019, from <https://training01.hsesinfo.org>. Friedman-Krauss, A., et al. (2019). *The state of preschool 2018*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. *The 2018 Rhode Island standard of need*. (2018). Providence, RI: Economic Progress Institute.

The RI Early Educator Investment Act:

1. Requires the state to **develop goals and a plan to improve the compensation of effective early educators** in Child Care, RI Pre-K, Early Intervention, and Family Home Visiting.
2. Instructs the Rhode Island Children's Cabinet to address the crisis the industry is facing in attracting and retaining staff by **establishing a cross-departmental target wage scale for early educators and by advancing strategies to improve compensation so there is parity with public school educators with comparable credentials.**
3. **Provides \$5 million in funding to pilot the Child Care WAGE\$ model in Rhode Island**, a research-based model designed to improve compensation and reduce turnover of qualified and skilled early educators working in child care settings. The program would provide tiered wage supplements to ensure the most qualified and skilled early educators can remain working in the programs that helped them earn their credentials and gain valuable skills promoting the learning and development of infants, toddlers, and young children.
4. **Establishes an Early Educator 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.

Currently, and for many years, early childhood programs face a staffing crisis and have a “hole in the bucket” spending very limited resources recruiting and training new staff who often leave for higher paying jobs. **Some child care programs report that 60% to 80% of their teachers leave each year, even before the pandemic.**

Many early educators, **almost all of whom are women, and many are women of color**, struggle to afford the cost of housing and food and have few supports and incentives to improve their education or skills or stay with their employer.

Children and families ultimately pay the cost of this workforce crisis as the improved outcomes associated with participating in high-quality early childhood programs depend on stable and strong relationships between children, families and skilled professionals.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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**

Rhode Island Early Educator Investment: Step Up to WAGE\$

Rhode Island Demonstration Project 2022-2023



Right from the
Start

ARPA funding is needed to provide additional compensation to child care educators who have specialized training in child/youth development and early education. **A \$5 million investment would help over 900 child care educators with credentials and degrees stay in the jobs they love.**

The Child Care WAGE\$® Program is a nationally recognized compensation strategy for the early care and education workforce. Child Care Services Association (CCSA), a non-profit organization in North Carolina created and has implemented the program in North Carolina since the 1990s. Both the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood model and the Child Care WAGE\$ model have been replicated in many other states under the supervision of the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood/ Child Care WAGE\$ National Center.

WAGE\$ provides **education-based salary supplements based on six-month periods working in the same child care program with the goal of increasing compensation, education, and retention of early educators.** The Child Care WAGE\$ model has a proven track record of reducing staff turnover and incentivizing educational advancement of early educators. Stable, adequately compensated, and well-trained educators are the foundation of quality child care.

The National Center works with each state to develop an education/incentive scale connected to staff education levels and to develop eligibility policies and procedures. The National Center then provides ongoing training and technical assistance with the expectation that each state will continue to pursue necessary funding to sustain and grow the program.

The National Center has developed a new approach for states that want to launch WAGE\$ with ARPA funds, *Step Up to WAGE\$*. The goal is to offer a modified “off the shelf” **demonstration program that can be implemented quickly and get money into the hands of deserving early educators.**

Since 2010, Rhode Island has been successfully implementing the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood national model providing scholarships and other supports to help child care educators (in centers and family child care programs) earn the national CDA credential as well as Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees at CCRI, RIC, and URI. The Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (RIAEYC) was awarded the contract to operate T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Rhode Island in 2017 and has a strong track record managing the current program. RIAEYC would become the administrative home for the Rhode Island Step Up to WAGE\$ model, working with the National Center, state agencies, and child care providers to make adjustments to the national model and implement quickly.

Child Care WAGE\$ can and should be run simultaneously with Rhode Island’s Pandemic Retention Bonus program.

Qualified child care educators would be eligible for both programs. The Child Care WAGE\$ model would only be available to staff who have the specialized knowledge and skills developed through attainment of the national CDA credential, college coursework, and or college degrees. In addition, the Child Care WAGE\$ model is focused on helping the lower-wage workforce so participants must earn an hourly wage from their child care employer or as a self-employed family child care provider that is no higher than \$33/hour (the 2021 median wage for educators in Rhode Island according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Rhode Island Early Educator Investment: Step Up to WAGE\$

Rhode Island Demonstration Project Budget 2022-2023 - DRAFT

Child Care WAGE\$ Payments to Educators Based on Education Levels	# of participants	Annual Award (In addition to \$3,000 Pandemic Retention Bonus)	Total Annual Child Care WAGE\$ Award
National CDA Credential	180	\$1,500	\$270,000
12 College Credits in ECE/Related Courses	180	\$2,500	\$450,000
AA degree with < 12 College Credits in ECE/Related Courses	150	\$4,000	\$600,000
AA degree with 12+ College Credits in ECE/Related Courses	150	\$5,000	\$750,000
BA degree with < 12 College Credits in ECE/Related Courses	150	\$7,000	\$1,050,000
BA degree with 12+ College Credits in ECE/Related Courses	135	\$10,000	\$1,350,000
	945		\$4,470,000.00
State Management, Staffing, Administration of Model (RIAIEYC)			\$415,000
National Child Care WAGE\$ Administration (Child Care Services Association)			\$10,000
GRAND TOTAL			\$4,895,000

Staff of both licensed child care centers and family child care homes would be eligible. The steps on the payment scale ladder above are a draft. A final scale ladder would be developed by Rhode Island in consultation with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood/Child Cre WAGE\$ National Center.

