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Testimony Re: S-2235, Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act

Senate Education 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, S-2235 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.**

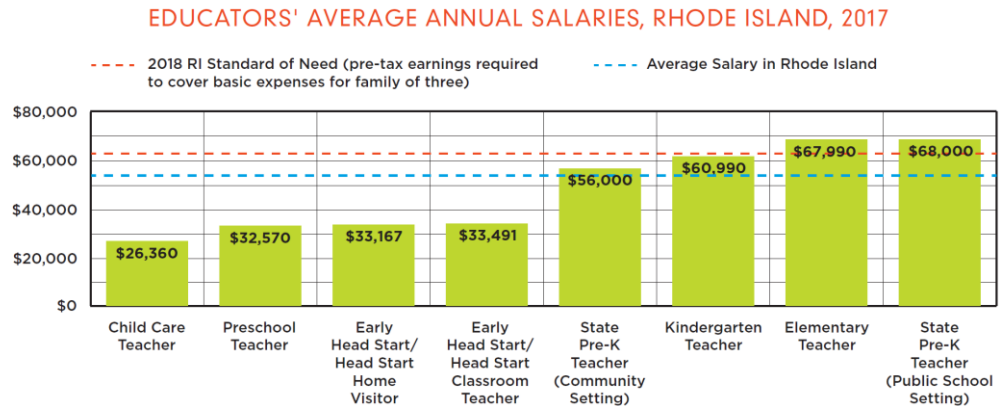
Low wages and unstable staffing create great challenges in delivering high-quality services to children and families and limits family access to services they need.

- 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**

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

WAGE PAY

Child care programs continue to pay regular wages to the educator.

PARENTS

Tuition & Co-Pays

RI DHS

Child Care Assistance Program

CHILD CARE PROGRAM

\$12.01/HR
AVERAGE WAGE

CHILD CARE EDUCATOR



\$2,000 – \$6,000 /QTR
WAGE SUPPLEMENT
DEPENDENT ON QUALIFICATIONS

WAGE SUPPLEMENT

Qualified child care educators apply for a wage supplement. Selected educators receive quarterly checks.*

ORGANIZATION MANAGING WAGE SUPPLEMENT

RI DHS
American Rescue Plan

* Educators receive supplement as long as they continue in the same program.