



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2311, An Act Relating To Human Services --  
Social And Human Services Programs Rate Review And Rate Setting  
Process Act Of 2022**

**Senate Finance Committee**

**April 28, 2022**

**Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would also like to thank Senator DiPalma for sponsoring this important bill and Senators Miller, Ruggerio, McCaffrey, Goodwin, Picard, Coyne, Calkin, Mendes, and Acosta for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for Senate Bill 2311, which would require the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) along with a 24-member advisory committee to provide expert review and recommendations for the process for rate setting and ongoing review of rate setting for all social and human service programs that would result in much-needed systemic change.

The human service provider workforce, including the community based DCYF provider workforce, and the children's behavioral health workforce is in crisis due to underfunding caused by a failure to ensure rates paid to community providers keep pace with the cost of providing services. For the first time in decades, community providers have vulnerable children on waitlists delaying services due to staffing issues and turnover. This has placed our children, youth, and families who are in desperate need of services at an unacceptable disadvantage. For example, Tides Family Services reports that for the first time since 1983 they have a waitlist for critical services. Their waitlist is up to 3 months long, and they are unable to accept new families into services.

Due to low rates and the inability to attract and maintain staff, a significant strain has been placed on community-based agencies. It takes a strong system of services and supports provided by both DCYF and by community providers to have the array of services families need. We urge that more funding go toward increasing rates for vital services provided by community-based agencies. Rates need to reflect the cost of providing services and they need to be reviewed regularly to ensure they cover the cost of providing services as time goes on.

As we emerge from the pandemic and more children, youth and families need services, we support the regular rate review and rate setting that is needed and is proposed in Senate Bill 2311, so we do not fall even further behind on rates as compared to the actual cost of providing services. We also support the continuation of the *ARPA* workforce stabilization funding so that it continues through the end of FY 2023. Continuation of this funding is desperately needed. We ask that \$12.5 million in rate increase be provided to continue wages established by wage stabilization bonuses and another

\$12.5 million to begin to address the cost of providing services including program losses, operational and salary needs, and recruitment incentives.

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This legislation cannot wait. We strongly urge you to pass Senate Bill 2311 to ensure both accurate and adequate reimbursement to all social and human service providers that facilitate the provision of high-quality services to our children, youth, and families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.