



July 29, 2020

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chairman, House Committee on Finance
82 Smith Street
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Representative Abney,

We are writing to express our **strong support for Budget Article 14 Amendment** to allow Medicaid coverage for prenatal visits conducted by the **First Connections Family Home Visiting Program**. This program has been a game changer in achieving positive short and long term health outcomes for Rhode Island babies and parents, and is a key driver in advancing equity for RI families statewide.

We see the efficacy of the First Connections program first hand. Right now, Family Service of RI's First Connections team is providing free, voluntary, confidential home visits to pregnant women and families with young children, birth to age three. We are helping Rhode Islanders prepare for parenthood, connecting parents and babies with health care providers and services, supporting safe sleep practices, linking parents with quality childcare, supporting kids to achieve developmental milestones, and ensuring families have what they need to succeed.

Further, RI babies and their parents were cut off from traditional supports during COVID-19, Family Service of RI's First Connections team were there – providing vital home and community visits to high-risk families throughout this crisis, often when other providers (both public and private) were unwilling to go out. Our teams have put themselves on the life-saving front lines, at all hours of the day and night, to ensure that Rhode Island's most vulnerable infants and families receive the services and supplies they need for their continued health and safety. Many of these families are known COVID-19 positive cases. Our First Connections staff have provided food, cleaning supplies, medication, formula, diapers and more at no cost to families; staff have even been designated as emergency proxies for WIC in some cases to ensure families' needs are met. Additionally, DCYF and Pediatricians have relied on First Connections staff to check on and weigh newborns weekly during the pandemic to lower the infant's risk of exposure to COVID-19, ensure safety and well-being in the home and continuously train parents about COVID-19 protocols.

Representative Abney, we implore you and the entire House Finance Committee to invest in RI babies and their parents by supporting Governor Raimondo's \$378,000 state funding proposal to expand First Connections and a Medicaid match of \$678,000 to sustain evidence-based family home visiting.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with questions at mhmcduff@familyserviceri.org.

Sincerely,

Margaret Holland McDuff
Chief Executive Officer