



Testimony to Rhode Island House Finance Committee: July 30, 2020

In Support of Increased CCAP Reimbursement Rates (DHS)

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The Children's Workshop, Inc.

We are Bailey Kent, President & CEO, Julie Boutwell, Chief Education Officer, and Sasha Brathwaite, Sr. VP, Business Operations, of The Children's Workshop. We thank the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today and for the work you do to support Rhode Island's children.

The Children's Workshop operates five early learning schools in Rhode Island. We have been in business for 30 years and we pride ourselves on offering programs (infant through school age) that are accessible to all children, regardless of their background or financial status. We proudly accept Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) funds; although the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our enrollment, prior to its onset, we served approximately 597 children in Rhode Island, 483 of whom receive tuition assistance through DHS and CCAP. In addition, we employed approximately 150 front-line and support staff in our schools and at our home office.

We are testifying today to express our strong support of Governor Raimondo's plan to invest \$3.9M of state funds to increase Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) reimbursement rates, as outlined in the proposed DHS budget. We believe that Rhode Island has made great strides by introducing tiered rates of reimbursement in previous legislative sessions, and we thank you for supporting our work; however, RI's reimbursement rates still do not meet the federally recommended benchmark to ensure equal access to high-quality care. Currently, Rhode Island is out of compliance with the equal access provision of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (2014).

As you know, many of Rhode Island's families cannot afford the increasing costs of high-quality childcare, and operating costs prohibit schools from charging less for services. As a result, many families are priced out of the highest-quality options, and this fact disproportionately impacts those who are furthest from opportunity. Additionally, early childhood educators struggle to make ends meet. Research demonstrates that 90% of brain development occurs within the first five years of life; imagine having this tremendous responsibility and making less than fifteen dollars per hour.

Children need access to affordable, high-quality care that supports their growth and development, families depend on childcare services in order to work, and early childhood educators deserve worthy wages. Low state investment rates impact all stakeholders, as well as Rhode Island's economy as a whole. To this end, we also wish to express our support for the proposed plan to sustain the \$1.2M of state funding for Head Start programs.

Like many of our early childhood education partners, our business has been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 public health crisis. Our typical funding streams are not enough to offset increased operating costs associated with the pandemic. The funding outlined in this year's DHS budget will help ensure that The Children's Workshop continues to provide the highest quality early education and care for many years to come.

We hope you will invest in our children and our economy by supporting this budget article. Supporting high-quality programs for Rhode Island's youngest and most vulnerable children reduces K-12 spending, allows families to return to and remain in the workforce, and develops strong early childhood educators.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify and for your consideration.

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