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Testimony Re: H-7291, Early Care and Education Workforce Data Act

**House 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 help babies and young children get off to the right start.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support passage of Representative Shallcross Smith’s Early Care Education Workforce Data Act, H-7291 which would codify the previously funded Rhode Island early care and education workforce registry data system in the general laws, require that the data system meets national standards, and provide a deadline for implementation. It also directs the department of human services to produce annual reports on the status of both the registry data system and the early care and education workforce.

High-quality early childhood programs have consistent, **effective educators 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.

According to the [National Workforce Registry Alliance](#) there are 42 states and the District of Columbia that have a functioning statewide early educator registry. Since 2022, Rhode Island has been building a workforce data system with the \$1 million in ARPA funding allocated in the FY23 budget.

Just this morning, I noticed that the National Workforce Registry Alliance changed the status of Rhode Island to “member with a registry.” On Sunday morning of this week, we were listed as “member working to build a registry.” In early January, Rhode Island was listed as a “non-member without a registry.” So, we are making progress! And DHS just last week announced that the new workforce registry data system, known as RISES or RI Start Early System, will launch this month.

This is our second chance and second major investment to create a statewide early care and education workforce data system. From 2012-2016, Rhode Island had a \$50 million Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant and spent millions working to create a comprehensive Early Care and Education Data System (ECEDS). A workforce data system was launched and [one report on the Rhode Island early care and education workforce was produced in 2016 before the data system was abandoned.](#)

Establishing an Early Care and Education Workforce Registry Data System in statute (following up on funding allocated in the FY23 budget) is a **critical piece of infrastructure** needed for a healthy and high-quality early care and education system. Registries are used 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.

Children and families pay the cost when we do not have a healthy, stable, and high-quality early care and education system. Data about the early care and education workforce will help policymakers make strategic decisions about resources to strengthen the early educator workforce to help expand access to high-quality child care and early learning programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.