

House Committee on Education
From: Parents Leading for Educational Equity
Re: Testimony in Favor of the Early Childhood IDEA Services Task Force Legislation Education H7438

Date: February 28, 2024

Greetings members of the House Committee on Education, my name is Ramona Santos Torres, I am the executive director of [Parents Leading for Educational Equity](https://pleeri.org) (PLEE) and a member of the steering committee for the Right from the Start Campaign. PLEE is a grassroots, family advocacy organization fighting for equitable systems of care for families and children. On behalf of PLEE and the parents we represent, I want to express the **strongest support** for house bill H7438.

The introduction of H7438 is timely given the current crisis in Rhode Island's Early Intervention (EI) program. As highlighted in reports by the Boston Globe and R.I. PBS, the state of RI is not in compliance with federal law governing services for the youngest Rhode Island children with disabilities, emphasizing the urgency and importance of addressing the issues within the EI program promptly. As of November 2023, there were 716 infants and toddlers who had been waiting more than 45 days for Early Intervention, far beyond the timeframe mandated by federal law. This underscores the severity of the situation and the critical need to address these challenges promptly and collaboratively.

This task force, comprising representatives from various organizations, including parents and caregivers of children with developmental delays and disabilities, ensures a comprehensive and inclusive perspective in crafting solutions to the prevailing challenges within the EI program. The involvement of parents and caregivers in the Early Childhood IDEA Services Task Force is essential, fostering a holistic and representative approach that strengthens the collaborative efforts needed to devise effective strategies for improving access to EI services.

I urge the House Committee on Education to not only support but expedite the passage of this legislation. The establishment of the Early Childhood IDEA Services Task Force is not just a step in the right direction; it is an essential measure to ensure that Rhode Island's youngest

children with developmental disabilities receive the timely and high-quality services they urgently need.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your commitment to the well-being and educational success of Rhode Island's children.

Sincerely,
Ramona Santos Torres
Executive Director
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