



**Rhode Island Department of Human Services**  
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*Office of the Director*  
Kimberly Merolla-Brito

May 2, 2025

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara  
Chair, House Committee on Education  
State House  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, 02903

**RE: H5596 – An Act Relating to Education – Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Education Act**

Dear Chair McNamara,

I am writing to you regarding House Bill 5596, a bill that proposes establishing a real-time, online seat finder at licensed early learning providers serving three-and four-year-old children.

DHS has been working with the Rhode Island Department of Education to launch and grow the Rhode Island Start Early System (RISES), which provides families with a consumer search function, a licensing system of record, and other important child care resources. RISES is an important tool for families to find providers who meet their unique needs and circumstances based on rating or location. It is our goal to see RISES become the one-stop, online resource that streamlines program education, information gathering, and provider comparisons.

While this legislation seeks to create a brand new resource with the inclusion of a live seat finder and other filters at an unknown cost, RISES is already providing families with the tools necessary to find high quality, child care at no additional cost to families and taxpayers.

For several years, the State has been making progress toward enhancing collaboration between agencies and creating policies, procedures and systems for the entire early childhood system inclusive of families with children ages three to four. The creation of another tool for this specific group would create unnecessary redundancy leading to consumer confusion.

Building on the current success of the RISES system, the next improvement phases targeted for later this year and soon thereafter will provide a searchable directory of providers compiling location, hours, quality ratings, tuition, language, tour availability, parent ratings, and subsidy eligibility. Additional updates coming to RISES include the ability for providers to promote enrollment openings for any age group, which promotes access to child care for more parents in

Rhode Island. The Office of Child Care will also provide educational resources and work with community partners and providers to ensure families understand how to utilize RISES efficiently.

It is also important to note RISES was developed with access for all in mind. Intended to become the centralized hub for all child care matters, RISES will enable families to apply directly to programs and join waitlists while also remaining accessible to families with disabilities or non-English speaking households.

If you have specific questions about RISES, please do not hesitate to contact Nicole Chiello (nicole.chiello@dhs.ri.gov).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kimberly Merolla-Brito  
Director  
RI Department of Human Services

CC:     The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education  
          The Honorable Mary Ann Shallcross Smith  
          Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of  
          Representatives  
          Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy