



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

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Office of the Director

Kimberly Merolla-Brito

March 17, 2026

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

Re: H7905 — An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Department of Human Services – Quality of Early Care and Education and School-Age Child Care Through Voluntary Quality Rating System

Dear Chair McNamara,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS), I am writing to you to provide clarification regarding House Bill 7905, which amends the statute surrounding Rhode Island's voluntary quality rating system for early care and education and school-age care. Through the Office of Child Care at DHS, I am sharing data-focused insights for the committee's consideration.

The proposed bill as written suggests that providers are unfairly assessed on physical spaces they cannot change because they are operating their program in RIDE-certified school buildings. The assessment of physical spaces is part of the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) that is one component that informs BrightStars data. There is no data to support that SACERS is negatively affecting the BrightStars rating of providers. In fact, many school-age programs have been able to achieve BrightStars ratings of three stars and above, reflecting the effectiveness of Rhode Island's research-based Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which evaluates programs across multiple domains of quality. As of January 2026, almost half (42 of 87) of the independent school-age programs are rated three, four, or five stars.

Passage of H 7905 would harm the integrity of quality measures that have been in place for over 30 years. Removal or amending the national SACERS tool would jeopardize reliable measures currently in place and it is only valid if it is implemented according to national standards. Importantly, the SACERS tool is used with other companion tools in early childhood programs and family child care homes to support quality improvement and promote better health, safety and child development.

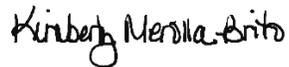
Another consideration for the committee is that BrightStars ratings are not determined by SACERS independently. Rather, the system is designed to reflect performance across a balanced set of indicators, including staff qualifications, family engagement, professional development, and program interactions. SACERS functions as one component of this comprehensive framework, and there is no evidence that programs are being denied higher ratings solely due to environmental assessment results. Training, technical assistance, and quality improvement supports are available to providers to help programs strengthen current practices over time, which serves to create high-quality learning settings for all children.

Additionally, text in H7905 to treat facility-based elements as “met or otherwise neutral” for school-age programs operating in RIDE-certified school buildings may have unintended consequences by weakening the integrity of BrightStars’ quality benchmarks. These indicators were not created in a vacuum and do have some impact on the effectiveness of a program. This is also particularly important for families given the variation in physical environments across school facilities. Licensing standards establish minimum safety requirements while BrightStars evaluates broader measures of program quality. Maintaining this distinction is important.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with providers, families, BrightStars, the Rhode Island Department of Education, and our legislative partners to help ensure policy changes are guided by accurate BrightStars data and established best practices.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director
Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education
The Honorable Julie A. Casimiro
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy