



Testimony Re: H-7905 – Department of Human Services – Quality of School-Age Child Care

House Education Committee

March 17, 2026

Leanne Barrett, Director of Early Childhood Policy and Strategy

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT opposes passage of H-7905 which would change the way the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS-U), a national program quality observation tool, is scored for licensed afterschool child care programs operating in public schools.

[Almost every state in the country has a child care Quality Rating and Improvement System \(QRIS\)](#) designed to assess, improve, and communicate about the quality of child care and early learning programs. Rhode Island's QRIS, known as BrightStars, was launched in 2009 after 4 years of community engagement and field testing. The quality frameworks are updated periodically in response to stakeholder feedback and national best practices.

As is common across the United States in almost every QRIS, each quality framework relies on the use of national valid and reliable program observation tools known as [Environment Rating Scales](#) to assess the quality of the child's experience in the program (or process quality). In Rhode Island, a nationally trained assessor uses the relevant Environment Rating Scale during a three-to-four-hour observation of a randomly selected classroom or group of children. The tools measure the quality of interactions between staff and children, activities and materials in the environment, observed health and safety practices, and other key features that contribute to quality such as space, furnishings, and schedule.

The Environment Rating Scales are only valid and reliable and predict improved child outcomes when they are implemented as designed - all of the items must be included in the final aggregate score. If this bill were to pass, the changes to how the SACER-U is used in Rhode Island would make the tool invalid and thus it would probably have to be removed from Rhode Island's school-age child care quality framework.

BrightStars quality frameworks and measurement criteria have been updated and revised periodically. The [school-age child care framework was just updated in August 2025](#). The SACERS-U program observation is a critical part of BrightStars and is the only measure for a child's daily experience to show the program is providing a safe, healthy, and stimulating environment, including offering indoor and outdoor space to support varied and enriching experiences for children.

We recognized that child care programs statewide are struggling to operate, to recruit and retain staff, and to meet quality standards because the state does not pay Child Care Assistance Program rates that cover the cost of quality or meet the federal equal access standard and very few families who pay private

tuition can afford to pay higher fees. **We need to ensure more public funding is available to support child care programs operating costs so they can meet research-based quality standards.**

Early care and school-age care programs in Rhode Island have several options to request help or changes to the BrightStars system, including:

- Request help directly from BrightStars to review strengths and challenges and develop a quality improvement plan to improve SACERS scores. The [RI Child Care Facilities Fund](#) also provides direct technical assistance and support to programs struggling with challenges related to space and furnishings.
- Request help from BrightStars and state leaders to **educate public school leaders (principals, superintendents, teachers, and custodians) about the fact that before and after school programs that operate in public school space must have adequate space and furnishings** to enable staff to provide stimulating and enriching activities where children have choices. Quality spaces allow children to safely store their belongings, complete homework, have a healthy snack, engage in active play and sports, participate in quiet activities such as board games and dramatic play, relax and hang out with friends.
- Programs that are not satisfied with their BrightStars rating may [appeal their overall star rating within 30 days](#). Programs can propose a global change to BrightStars standards or criteria by submitting a written proposal to the RIAEYC Executive Director. Appeals of ratings and proposals to change criteria are reviewed by state partners and presented to the BrightStars Steering Committee and/or the BrightStars Advisory Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.