



May 7, 2024

Testimony Re: H 7124

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Connecting for Children and Families (CCF) is a community-based nonprofit organization located in the highest need neighborhood in Woonsocket, one of RI's most under-resourced cities. CCF's mission is to serve Woonsocket/Northern RI by providing family-centered programs/educational opportunities that empower children, families, and individuals to thrive/succeed. We envision Woonsocket/Northern RI as a strong, uplifting community. Here, every person can thrive. Our vision is a community that works collectively to eliminate inequities; that is always listening and constantly evolving to more intentionally serve its members; and that takes care of each other, so every person achieves success.

Our work here is absolutely essential: CCF serves low-income Northern RI/Woonsocket families. Our primary target is Woonsocket where:

- the child poverty rate (29.5%) is the second highest;
- 50% of children live in single parent households;
- the unemployment rate, (5.4% in March) is one of RI's highest;
- 19.2% of residents live in poverty;
- the high school graduation rate (64%) is the state's lowest.

People here struggle to pay for rent/heat/ electricity/ transportation, needed prescriptions, and such basic needs as food, formula, and clothing.

One of the key family support initiatives we provide is our 5-star Early Educational Care (Childcare) program for working families. Here, we serve 95 children—Toddlers, Preschoolers, RI Pre-K, and school-age children—and their working parents.

As stated in H7124, “access to affordable, high-quality childcare is essential to support the labor force participation of parents with children from infancy through age twelve and to maximize the economic productivity of the state.” In 2020, the RI response to COVID-19 proved just how essential childcare is to the economy. *Today, the childcare industry is in crisis.* Supports are needed now to put the necessary infrastructure in place and to sustain the affordable, high-quality childcare that will help grow the Rhode Island economy while at the same time preparing young children to succeed in school.

CCF supports House Bill 7124, the Rhode Island Childcare Essential Act, for several reasons:



- We must build a stable, well-educated early childhood workforce here in RI. This bill would expand family eligibility to the federal benchmark of 85% of State Median Income (\$89,482 for a family of 3 in 2024) and allow families to retain the subsidy up to 100% of the State Median Income (\$105,273 for a family of 3 in 2024) for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). It would also provide a 50% rate increase for infants in CCAP.
- This bill would enable more low-income working families to qualify for the childcare assistance program and would further enable them to remain in the program longer, thereby stabilizing family well-being and providing consistent and affordable high-quality childcare to low-income children. Quality early care has been proven to creating a foundation for future success in school.
- 7124 is a comprehensive bill that provides long-term resources to the childcare industry and that supports low-income families with consistent, affordable, and high-quality childcare.
- A strong, sustainable childcare industry is essential to sustaining and growing the Rhode Island economy.
- But in today's environment, a two-parent family with one child and with both parents working full-time at minimum wage (\$14/hour) earns too much money to qualify for a childcare subsidy. In 2025, the Rhode Island minimum wage will increase to \$15/hour, making even more two-parent working families ineligible for CCAP. *Parents need access to affordable, high-quality childcare if they are to continue working while still helping their children learn and thrive. The Rhode Island economy needs passage of this bill now.*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Connecting for Children and Families strongly urges your support for House Bill 7124, the RI Childcare Essential Act.

Sincerely,

Erin Spaulding
Executive Director