



May 9, 2024

To: RI State House of Representatives - Finance Committee
From: Kimberly Fernandez, Executive Director, Federal Hill House
RE: Support for Representative Diaz's Child Care is Essential Bill (H-7124)

We are writing today in strong support of the Child Care is Essential Bill (H-7124) on behalf of Federal Hill House, an organization whose mission is to help our neighbors in Federal Hill, Olneyville, and the surrounding community thrive, at every stage of life. Families need access to affordable, high-quality child care, so parents can work and children can grow, learn, and thrive. This bill would successfully support the notion that child care is essential for parents to work, for the state to have a strong economy, and for children in Rhode Island to develop and learn properly.

For many years Federal Hill House has operated an Early Learning Center (childcare) that now has six classrooms and a capacity of up to 70 children ages six weeks through five years. 85% of our families receive childcare assistance through the state, and I can attest to the fact that the current funding model is NOT SUSTAINABLE for our center to continue to provide quality childcare for families in our community.

State funding for child care has drastically decreased in the past 20 years, and yet even middle-income families cannot afford the full cost of quality care. On top of this, the median wage for a child care educator in Rhode Island is just \$13.26 per hour. This bill would ensure that child care providers serving infants under 18 months shall be paid a differential bonus to help address staffing and operating challenges in programs serving babies. This is absolutely essential for our child care staff, many of whom have children of their own as well. Another essential piece of this bill is the raise in family income eligibility limits for child care subsidies. Currently, the Rhode Island limit is the lowest in New England, but the proposed amount in this bill would make the state one of the highest, ensuring that quality child care is affordable for more families. For providers like us, this would improve operational quality many times over, as it would boost retention rates and help us attract talented staff to boost Rhode Island's children during the early stages of life.

The need for high-quality child care is critical for the people of Rhode Island. This bill will not only address an affordability crisis for parents, but will give child care providers a much-needed boost to prepare the children of Rhode Island for a bright future. Thank you for your time and attention. We are happy to speak further with anyone who is interested and can be reached at 401-421-4722 or kfernandez@federalhillhouse.org.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Fernandez
Executive Director

Pamela Romero
Education Director

Christina Loureiro
Early Learning Center Program Coordinator