

Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill No. H7225, Article 9, Section 5

House Finance Committee Hearing on February 28, 2024.

My name is Lisa Jones. I am a member of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island Policy & Advocacy Committee, a registered voter and I live in Providence, Rhode Island. I stand in support of the budget proposals listed in H7225, Article 9, Section 5. Rate increases for both Early Intervention and First Connections (EI & FC) are much needed as workers in these programs have been underpaid for years. These funds should be allocated to wage increases for those working directly with the children in these programs as there is a shortage of providers in RI. Compared to workers in these same fields in other locations, EI & FC workers are underpaid in RI and able to find better paying jobs doing the same work elsewhere. This proposed increase may help secure qualified providers in RI for these programs but I do not believe the increases go far enough.

This issue has been longstanding, and our children are the ones paying the price. The children are our future and ensuring each child has the tools and skills to thrive should be our main priority. Paying providers a wage that is competitive will help alleviate the issue and ensure children in Rhode Island have access to the early childhood services they need.

Doing right by our children and the people that work to ensure their successful development will not only help our children start on the right foot, it will also help to prevent even more costly services in the future.

Please increase wages for these providers. Give them a competitive wage so we can get them back into Rhode Island to help our children receive the services they need to thrive without wait or interruption.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Jones', written in a cursive style.

Lisa Jones