



Children's FRIEND

Making a difference...
one child at a time.



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February 28, 2024

Chairman Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony regarding the Governor's FY2025 Budget H7225, Article 9, Section 5 – Early Intervention and First Connection rates

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

Our testimony today concerns the Governor's FY2025 proposed budget related to the Medicaid rates, specifically those for Early Intervention ("EI") and First Connections. We appreciate that the Governor's proposed budget includes 100% of the recommended rate increase for Early Intervention – although programs will take a big hit if these rates start October 1 as his budget assumes. **We need the EI rates to start July 1, not a full quarter later.**

We also strongly encourage the General Assembly to ensure the final FY2025 budget maintains the current rates for First Connections, not the significantly reduced amount in the proposed FY25 Budget. Without action by the General Assembly, the current First Connections rates will be reduced by 70% on July 1st. No provider can continue to provide this service with such a dramatic rate reduction. The General Assembly should make the existing First Connections Medicaid rates permanent and provide a statutory annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for First Connections. A bill will be introduced by Representative Giraldo that will do these two things and we urge you to pass that bill instead of the Governor's proposed rates.

For 190 years, we at Children's Friend have worked to advance the well-being and healthy development of the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rhode Island. Today, alongside our permanency, nutrition services, child care, Head Start and Pre-K programs, we serve 600 children in our Early Intervention program and 400 in our First Connections program.

First Connections and Early intervention are separately funded programs, but are very intertwined. In fact, First Connections is the feeder program for Early Intervention. First Connections, a newborn home visiting program funded through the Department of Health, provides critical support to parents and foster parents as a "Bridge" to formal Early Intervention services. The state must fund both EI and First Connections at the full rates, so we can continue providing these life-saving services.

First Connections hasn't had a permanent rate increase in over 22 years. The last several years, the General Assembly has used ARPA funds to provide a temporary rate increase which allowed us to continue to provide services to families. But if the Governor's proposal goes through as is, we will take a 70% cut from our current rates.



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First Connections connects new moms with a nurse or social worker right after she comes home from the hospital. This important program helps support mom and new baby to promote self-sufficiency and prevent child abuse and neglect. For the families with whom we work, most of whom are earning less than the federal poverty level, this program helps them start their parenting on the right foot and ensures that both mother and child are able to access health, mental health and early learning services that can ensure that the child is able to grow and thrive.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to support the children who are the future of our State. If you have further questions or need any additional information, please contact me at dcaprio@cfsri.org.

Sincerely,

David Caprio
President and CEO