

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING H7225, ARTICLE 9, SECTION 5

To: Chair, Clerk and Members House Finance Committee

From: Linda Shaw, MD, MSSW, Member-Policy and Advocacy Committee, WFRI

Date: 2/25/24

As a retired pediatrician and member of the Policy and Advocacy Committee of the Women's Fund of RI, I strongly support important rate increases for Early Intervention and First Connections. Clearly these programs need even more support than the FY25 budget proposes.

Women's Fund of RI aims to achieve gender equity through systemic change. A pediatricians' mission is to "attain optimal physical, mental and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents and young adults". Programs which strengthen families are critical to gender equity and family health.

Early Intervention and First Connections /Family Home Visiting are invaluable to the well-being of children and their families. Early in my professional career, as a hospital-based social worker, I worked in a clinic where children were diagnosed with disabilities. My role included referring children with speech, motor, and/or cognitive delays for interventions. It is well studied that the earlier such services are begun, the more the value to a child with the delay. Later, as a pediatrician I treated premature infants with brain bleeds, children with autism, speech and/or hearing abnormalities, chromosomal disorders, congenital defects, etc. Such children deserve appropriate interventions, as early as possible. When even later my career focussed on maltreated children, I readily appreciated the importance of early intervention for the many children I assessed who had suffered abusive head trauma. As a child abuse pediatrician the value of home visitation and its relationship to family stability and strength also became absolutely clear to me.

I appreciate your consideration of H 7225, Article 9, Section 5 and your attention to my reasons for supporting this budget priority. A recent opinion article in the NYTimes was titled, "We Americans Neglect our Children". I agree with the gist of it, suggesting we may pamper our own kids, but as a country we fall scandalously short when formulating policy. We in RI should strive to do better.

Thank you