

April 30, 2024
Aimee Sherman
Assistant Teacher
In support of H-7251

Dear House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony. I am in strong support for **Susan Donovan's bill, H-7251, the Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act.**

My name is Aimee Sherman and I am a 46 year old wife and mother who has been given the chance to make a recent career move that benefits my whole family, thanks in large part to the financial assistance afforded me by the Step Up To Wages supplement and pandemic education retention bonuses. I am in strong support for Representatives Susan Donovan and Sandra Cano's Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act (Bill S-2038) because it will allow me to stay in a new career that I love.

For 20 years prior to the Covid pandemic, I worked full time as a retail manager for two different, well respected housewares companies. There were certainly aspects of my job that I loved, but I wasn't sure I was really doing something that made me feel like I was making a difference. My husband is also a retail manager and we spent weekends, holidays and evenings at work instead of with our growing daughter making memories. Basically, we felt like that was just "how life was" and kept doing the same over and over, living paycheck to paycheck and dealing with more disgruntled customers than happy faces each day.

When Covid happened, our situation changed like so many others. My retail company closed down all of its East Coast locations and I lost my job in summer of 2020. Since there was no telling when retail would be a viable full time option again, I agreed to go work as a teaching assistant for my mother, who is the founder and director of the Charlestown Early Learning Center in Charlestown, Rhode Island. Truth be told, my mother had been trying to get me into the "family biz" of teaching for years and I just never felt like it was for me. Still, since I had no job and she was offering me a chance to get out of the house for 25 hours a week to play with some small kiddos and be with family, I figured- why not?

I've been asking myself "why not" ever since. Why didn't I leave the stress of retail to be the source of smiles for 3-5 year old children every day? Why did I sell expensive pots and pans to people who really didn't need them instead of teaching the most important things at the most crucial time in a child's development? Why did I only hear customer complaints for 20 years instead of the grateful thank you's from parents who trust me with their most special gift every day? Why did it take me so long to do a job that makes me feel appreciated, respected and loved?

The answer is money, of course. It is so simple. If Covid hadn't forced me to leave, I never would have given up the financial stability of my retail job. If I hadn't received extra financial

support from programs like Step Up To Wages, I would not have been able to stay teaching for this long. I would have had to go back to retail when things opened up just to make ends meet and instead, I have been able to work at a job I love and even take 24 credits in Early Childhood Education at CCRI to further my education as an adult.

There are no words to describe what it means to be able to have weekends off and take my daughter to track meets, sleepovers and family events. There is nothing better than enjoying Christmas and Thanksgiving with my family without having to be at work at sunrise the next day. I am so lucky to be able to work with not only my mother, but my sister as well, since she is also a teacher at the center. The family time this job has afforded me is priceless, not to mention the fun and joy of seeing a bunch of preschoolers excited to see me every day.

I want to continue to teach and learn as long as I possibly can. As long as I can afford to, I will stay in the education sector and try to make a difference in the lives of the families in South County; even though I drive an hour from Providence to get there! We all know that teachers are horribly underpaid, especially in a small non-profit like my center, and dedicated people like myself may not be able to continue doing the work they do without extra financial help until wages catch up to the importance of educators. Please consider keeping these programs going so our children can be taught by people who truly care.

The Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act will invest \$2.5 million to continue the Child Care WAGE\$ national model program, to provide substantial wage supplements to recognize, reward, and retain qualified and skilled early educators with CDAs, associate's, and bachelor's degrees. This program will end in summer 2024 without new funding.

This act will also invest \$5 million to continue retention bonuses at \$3,000 per year for some early educators, those who are lower-wage, consistent, frontline child care staff, beyond the projected end date in September 2024 to prevent loss of staff/closure of more classrooms and program.

Our child care providers are essential workers. They are being underpaid and undervalued. They deserve our investment, and it cannot wait. Please support the **Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act**.

Thank you,

Aimee Sherman

Preschool teaching assistant

Charlestown Early Learning Center