

# American Academy of Pediatrics

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## Rhode Island Chapter

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Chairman Abney and members of the committee.

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I would like to provide testimony on behalf of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics in support of House bill 7251 (The Early Educator Compensation Bill). I have been practicing pediatrics in Rhode Island for 37 years and serve as the medical director for Meeting Street Center in Providence. Meeting Street provides educational and rehabilitation services for a diverse population of children from birth through age 21. Included among those services are Early Head Start, Early Intervention, Healthy Families America, and The Bright Horizons daycare center. Birth to age 3 is a critical period of infant development particularly cognitive and emotional development. The previously mentioned programs provide significant support for families as their children grow and develop during this critical time.

Over the last several years, it has been very difficult to attract and retain qualified individuals to fill these early childhood educator roles leading to very long waiting lists for families attempting to receive services for their children. Waits of 6 months or more are not uncommon. A 6 month wait during this time is a significant wasted opportunity to help stimulate a child's development during this critical time. During the COVID 19 pandemic there was a significant disruption of services for many children which has had a significant adverse effect on these children's development.

The Child Care Wages act will provide significant financial support for early childhood educators leading to increased recruitment and retention of these critically important individuals. Currently many early childhood educators earn less than 23 dollars/hour which is insufficient to cover typical living expenses for a family. I have often heard families say "It is less expensive for me to stay home than work given the cost of childcare"

To quote Whitney Houston " Children are the future" We must support early childhood development to assure the optimal cognitive and emotional development of the next generation. A relatively small investment today will help promote healthy cognitive and emotional development, academic success, and ultimately career success for our children. It will help decrease mental health issues lowering our health care costs in the future. Increased career success will decrease the likelihood of unemployment further helping to improve the economy.

Thank you for your anticipated support of House Bill 7251.

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