

Child & Family

Caring for our Rhode Island Community since 1866

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Chairperson Abney, Vice Chair Slater and Marszalkowski and representatives,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written testimony on behalf of Child & Family Services of Rhode Island, where I serve as CEO. We are writing to inform you that H-7251 is a bill that will play a vital role in the growth, development, and success of our youngest children through ensuring adequate staffing, and we here at Child & Family support it. In addition to serving children, youth, families and seniors in Rhode Island since 1866, we have one of the broadest continuums of child welfare and child well-being programs in the State. Those programs include East Bay Family Care Community Partnership (FCCP), Evidence Based Family Preservation Programs, juvenile justice services, all levels of foster care, enhanced supervised community living for youth who have spent years in residential treatment, independent living for youth aging out of care as well as pregnant and parenting teens and our Sandpipers Early Learning program. Our commitment and partnership with the youth and families we serve has enabled us to achieve the right outcomes of permanency, stability, housing, education and employment.

Allow me to also thank the members of this Subcommittee for supporting the three critical initiatives currently in place that aid in supplemental income for our lowest paid child care educators.

Although we are proud of our outcomes and the strength of our staff as we continue to emerge from the pandemic, Rhode Island's early educators are inadequately paid and supported leading to this statewide staffing shortage. In a 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals, it was found that 40% of infant/toddler educators were worried about having enough food to feed their family, and 50% were worried about having enough money to pay for housing. 1/3rd of early educators had a second job and almost 2/3rds reported that they planned to leave their early education if compensation did not improve.

Here at Child and Family, we are not operating our Sandpipers Early Learning program at full capacity. We have 2 classrooms closed due to not being able to hire adequately trained staff and have waitlists for all of our open classrooms. Having classrooms closed and waitlists is doing a disservice to the community we serve.

I urge you to support the Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act which will:

1. Provide significant wage supplements for frontline workers in early learning programs through the Child Care WAGE\$ program. This model has been in place

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Caring for our Rhode Island Community since 1866 in other states for 10-20 years finding success. Continue this \$2.5 million/year investment to recognize and retain our most highly skilled educators.

2. Continue retention bonuses that began as Pandemic Retention Bonuses in 2021. These payments have gone to over 5,000 staff of licensed childcare centers and family childcare homes. Going forward these payments could go to individuals working on the frontline directly with children that earn less than \$23/hour.
3. Make the Child Care for Child Care Educators pilot program permanent. As of January 2024, 50% of child care centers and 5% of family child care homes in the state have at least one staff member participating in the program. This program would be permanent and have the family income cap removed to match the Kentucky model, which has been successful.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Marty Sinnott