



April 30, 2024

To: RI House of Representatives – Finance Committee
From: Leadership and Staff of Federal Hill House
RE: Support for Representative Donovan's Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Bill (H-7251)

We are writing today in strong support of the Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Bill (H-7251) on behalf of Federal Hill House, an organization whose mission is to help our neighbors in Federal Hill, Olneyville, and the surrounding community thrive, at every stage of life. Families need access to affordable, high-quality child care, so parents can work and children can grow, learn, and thrive. To support this as a provider, we need to attract and maintain high-quality talent, and increasing wages is a major piece of the puzzle.

For many years Federal Hill House has operated an Early Learning Center (childcare) that now has six classrooms and a capacity of up to 70 children ages six weeks through five years. 85% of our families receive childcare assistance through the state, and I can attest to the fact that the current funding model is NOT SUSTAINABLE for our center to continue to provide quality childcare for families in our community.

State funding for child care has drastically decreased in the past 20 years, and yet even middle-income families cannot afford the full cost of quality care. On top of this, the median wage for a child care educator in Rhode Island is just \$13.97 per hour. This bill would continue COVID-era retention bonus payments only for individuals who work on the frontlines directly with children, earn less than \$23/hour, and have been consistently receiving a payment. This is absolutely essential for our child care staff, many of whom have received these bonuses and have expressed concerns about them disappearing. For providers like us, this would improve operational quality many times over, as it would boost retention rates and help us attract talented staff to boost Rhode Island's children during the early stages of life.

The need for high-quality child care is dire for your constituents and the people of Rhode Island as a whole. This bill will not only address an affordability crisis for parents (higher wages often means higher costs), but will give child care providers a much-needed boost to maintain the level of care needed to prepare the children of Rhode Island for a bright future. Thank you for your time and attention. We are happy to speak further with anyone who is interested and can be reached at 401-421-4722 or kfernandez@federalhillhouse.org.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Fernandez
Executive Director

Pamela Romero
Education Director

Christina Loureiro
Early Learning Center Program Coordinator