

April 30, 2024

Samantha Pescarino

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.**

Good afternoon - My name is Samantha Pescarino. I work at the Goddard School in South Kingstown and have been an employee at this center since April of 2015. I began my journey in this field as an assistant teacher with my only prior experience being babysitting, my church's bible camp and a love for working with the youth. In the last 9 years I transitioned roles into a lead toddler teacher and then most recently, a center wide curriculum coordinator. I have always worked full time and was present the day our center opened back up shortly after the pandemic shut down, throughout my pregnancy until I gave birth and as I attended school at CCRI and then RIC, graduating magna cum laude in May of 2023. While I was told I did not have enough of the requirements necessary to qualify for the Step Up To WAGE\$ even with my almost decade of experience or degree in Psychology with a minor in Behavioral Neuroscience, I find it absolutely critical that those who do fall under these qualifications are advocated for. I was fortunate however to have qualified for the retention bonuses which have made a SIGNIFICANT impact on my life in helping me afford groceries, diapers and clothing for my child, rent, and overall general life expenses. I myself struggle weekly to provide for myself and my daughter. I have stayed in this field even knowing I can barely make ends meet for my daughter and I because of the relationships I have built with families, the owners of my center and the co-workers that have stuck through it all. I have seen so much turnover staff wise in my time, and I would say the majority of it is due to low wages resulting in the inability to thrive comfortably in this economy, long hours, and inconsistencies within the classroom environment staffing wise. I have such a passion for working with children and post-pandemic children need our support more than ever. The retention bonus's give childcare workers an incentive for being a consistent face in these little human's lives during these vital formative years. Please give support where it is necessary. These children will be our future and deserve caretakers who genuinely stick around because they love what they do every single day. 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**.

Sincerely,

Samantha Pescarino