

April 30, 2024
Tanya Petrone
Lead 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 Tanya Petrone. I've been an early childhood educator for 15 years. I have a BA and I am certified to teach Pre-k to grade 2 in the state of RI. I paid my own way through college. Because I lived at home I was not able to qualify for any financial aid. I was awarded a 300.00 pell grant it paid one book. I had to take out private student loans because I did not qualify for federal again because I lived at home. My parents could not afford to pay for my college, they provided the roof over my head. I worked through high school and college to try and save but it was not enough. I ended up with about 40,000 in private student loans with a high interest rate. In 2009 I had to leave the early childhood field because I could not afford to pay my student loan bill. I was not being paid enough at the time. In 2013 I was able to return to teaching now with my early childhood certification and a BA degree in hand. Still not making the money I had hoped for, but I was just grateful to be back working with children. I love teaching and the children. That's why early childhood do what they do. We work very hard all year long! We work all 12 months out of the year no school vacations no summers off. We choose it because we love the age group and the teaching profession. We work our tails off and in my opinion are not considered as real teachers. We are daycare and baby sitters to most people, and honestly we are paid maybe a little more money than a fast food worker. I knew I was never going to make millions teaching, but I never thought that I would struggle to make ends meet. This is why this program is so important. I have to say no one wants to work in early childhood right now. We are very short staffed at my center and it is very hard to find qualified teachers. People are stepping away from the field because of the pay grade and the amount of work we do. This is why programs like this are so very important to fund and keep going! Early childhood teachers need to be recognized for all the work they do! This program has helped me out financially more than you can imagine. I am so grateful to be one of the teachers that were chosen to receive this grant. This grant has also given me the opportunity to purchase some new items for my classroom. On a personal level it made me feel valued, has given me hope, and has given me incentive to stay in the field. Many times I had considered leaving for financial reasons. However I know I would not be happy doing another job. Teaching is so rewarding to me I know I'm out there making a difference in children's lives. Please continue to fund these grant programs for early childhood teachers they are essential to this future of this profession.

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**.

Sincerely,

Tanya Petrone