

Testimony in Support of *H 7251*
Rhode Island Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act
House Committee on Finance
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The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative Donovan's H7251, which directs the Departments of Human services and Education to collaborate to sustain and strengthen existing workforce development and compensation programs for educators working in licensed child care and early learning programs statewide.

Qualified early educators are necessary for Rhode Island's children to have the best outcomes. Quality early care and education are the building blocks for children's academic success, social-emotional development, and lifelong employment and health outcomes. The current child care workforce faces issues with recruitment, low wages, and retention. Rhode Island needs to invest in our early educators to reopen classrooms, decrease child care costs, and shorten waiting lists.

Rhode Island has a severe staffing crisis in early care and education programs that has destabilized high-quality care and support for infants, toddlers, and their families; the staffing crisis has also harmed workers and the economy. There are three initiatives that are helping stabilize the early care and education workforce, and they are *scheduled to end this summer*: 1. the Child Care for Child Care Educators program, which provides free child care for qualified child care educators; 2. the Child Care WAGE\$, which provides significant wage supplements to help keep skilled and lower-wage early educators in early care and education classrooms; and 3. the pandemic retention bonus program, which provides wage supplements to over 4,000 child care staff each year for the last two years. Representative Donovan's H 7251 would maintain funding for Child Care WAGE\$ program and retention bonuses to increase retention of credentialed early educators. Additionally, this bill would allocate funding for the T.E.A.C.H program, which provides scholarships to students interested in early childhood education. These are critical programs necessary to support recruitment and retention of high-quality early educators.

These investments in Rhode Island's early educators will yield great long-term benefits, not only for this essential workforce, but also for infants and toddlers, their families, the communities they live in, and our state's economy. We urge passage.