

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, Senate Committee on Education
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of H-5462

Dear Chairman Abney:

My name is Robert MacDonald, and I am testifying in support of H-5462, a bill that would allow children to stay in Early Intervention until September after they turn three. The current Early Intervention system in RI is only required to serve children until they turn 3 and then they are immediately cut off. If children are still eligible for services, they are then supposed to be enrolled in their district's preschool special education program. Currently, finding a placement that meets the needs of these students is extremely difficult and children are losing out on valuable education and therapies, particularly when the child turns 3 after the school year is underway.

This bill would:

- Give families the choice of staying with their EI provider until the start of the school year after the child turns 3.
- Ensure continuity of care for children receiving services; and
- Provides adequate time for providers to ensure they can serve children past the age of 3.

I am supporting this bill for several reasons. As a parent with a child who is now 18, he was fortunate enough to receive Early Intervention at 18 months old through Meeting Street, having been diagnosed to be on the autism spectrum. Embracing the term Neuro-Divergent today, it is truly a superpower, and I learn from him every day. We all can learn from individuals like him. He will be enrolling as a freshman at RIC this fall. His accomplishments are a direct result of services that started with Meeting Street School at that critical age. Age three and onward, Providence schools (Head Start), IEPs throughout his education career, The Autism Project, activities outside of the helping arena; through many peers and professionals along the way, he was given a fighting chance to level the playing field. As a clinical social worker, I have often referred clients to RIPIN for a variety of services as many systems can be daunting to navigate. The peer model works because they know what it is like to sit in that chair. It is immediate trust and rapport. As Chair for the Parents Advisory Committee for Children with Special Needs at my son's school, RIPIN again was instrumental with their guiding support for children, their caregivers and educators who

wanted the best for these kids, always a phone call way. Since then, much has changed in the last several years. Children are not being served adequately, backlogs are a daily occurrence, and federal regulations are being pushed aside and violated. The school districts can no longer keep up, excuses logged and a general acceptance of apathy is rampant. Children and their caretakers suffer. Continuity of care must remain until other services are securely established and reliable. I urge you to vote in favor of bill H-5462. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of H-5462.

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