



May 15, 2025

Chairman Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In support of Rep McNamara's bill H5199, Guidelines for Pre-K expansion

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David Caprio
President and
Chief Executive Officer

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

We write in strong support of Representative McNamara's bill H5199 that will ensure that Pre-K programs are sustained and implemented in a way that supports our state's overall early education goals. This bill highlights the importance of the pre-K program's mixed delivery system and underscores that the state must invest in compensation for our educators across the early education continuum including infant and toddler care.

For over 190 years, we at Children's Friend have worked to advance the well-being and healthy development of the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rhode Island. Today, alongside our permanency, home visiting, child care, Head Start and nutrition services, we provide high quality pre-k education to over 200 four-year-olds in our state funded Pre-K classrooms. For the families with whom we work, most of whom are earning less than the federal poverty level, our Pre-k, child care, and Head Start classrooms are a lifeline that enables them to go to work each day and strive for a better future for their children.

This bill, which requires that 30% of any Pre-K investment will be used to simultaneously support infant and toddler programs is following Rhode Island's own state Pre-K Plan from December 2022 which stated: "a potential unintended consequence of expanding pre-kindergarten programming can be a reduction in infant/toddler capacity. RI already has a crisis in access and affordability for infant/toddler care and causing greater disruption in this space will lead to significant economic disruption and make it difficult for young parents to participate in the workforce." The report recommends between 10% and 30% Infant/Toddler Set Aside to ensure continued support for infant/toddler capacity as the state expands Pre-K.

Having staff leave infant/toddler programs to work in Pre-K would make a bad situation even worse. We currently have over 100 children on a wait list

for infant and toddler slots and are delayed in opening a new location because we are struggling to hire teachers. And this wait list number under-represents the need, because many parents don't bother to put their name on the list after they hear how long the wait is to get into a program.

We were grateful to see that last year's budget did allocate \$1 million dollars out of Pre-K spending for DHS to use on infant/toddler programs. We need that to continue. Please pass Representative McNamara's bill and ensure that as we invest in Pre-K expansion, we also support programs for infants and toddlers such as Early Head Start and infant/toddler child care.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to support the children who are the future of our state. If you have further questions or need any additional information, please contact me at dcaprio@cfsri.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Caprio", with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Caprio
President and CEO