

Testimony in Support of HB-5199  
Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Education Act  
House Committee on Education  
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**The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative McNamara's HB-5199**, which would ensure investments for competitive compensation for teachers, as well as sustain and strengthen access to other essential parts of the early care and education system, particularly infant and toddler care.

All children deserve access to high-quality early education. Early care and education programs, such as Head Start and Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP), support the growth and development of Rhode Island's babies, young children, and their families. 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 Pre-K Education Act would continue investments in Pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start, while also allocating a 30% funding set-aside to sustain and expand access for childcare and early learning programs for infants and toddlers. The Governor's proposed budget does not continue FY2025's 30% set-aside for infants and toddler childcare and early learning. This would be a *loss of \$1.1 Million* for Rhode Island's high-quality infant and toddler childcare and Early Head Start. Rhode Island's Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP) and Head Start enrollment have decreased by 29% and 39%, respectively, while enrollment in Pre-K has increased by more than 600%.<sup>1</sup> Almost one in three Rhode Island three- and four-year olds are enrolled in a Head Start or Pre-K program.<sup>2</sup> Public investments in early education produce significant long-term benefits for children, such as improved education, economic health, and social outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, Representative McNamara's HB-5199 would make funds available to ensure the median wages for all Pre-K and Head Start early educators are competitive wages in parity with similarly qualified K-12 teachers. In 2024, community Pre-K and Head Start teachers were making more than \$29,000 and \$35,000 less annually than their public-school counterparts,

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<sup>1</sup> Head Start program reports to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2014-2023. RI Pre-K enrollment for 2014 from National Institute for Early Education Research, The State of Preschool, 2015. RI Pre-K enrollment for 2015-2023 from Rhode Island Department of Education.

<sup>2</sup> [Children Enrolled in Head Start or Pre-K, page 126, RI KIDS COUNT Factbook, 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy, The Heckman Equation, 2013](#)

respectively.<sup>4</sup> Competitive wages are necessary for retaining and recruiting highly qualified early educators. Rhode Island needs to invest in our early educators to reopen classrooms, decrease childcare costs, and shorten waiting lists.

These investments in Rhode Island's early education programs will yield long-term benefits, not only for our children, but also for their families, their teachers, their communities, and our state's economy. The Economic Progress Institute urges passage.

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<sup>4</sup> [Pre-K Expansion Factsheet, Right from the Start, 2025](#)