

Rhode Island House Committee on Finance
House Bill 5199
Informational Testimony on Behalf of the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center
May 13, 2025

Chair Abney, Vice Chairs Slater and Marszalkowski, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide informational testimony regarding H.B. 5199, which proposes to establish a 30% funding set aside from RI Pre-K expansion funds to sustain and strengthen access to quality infant and toddler child care. High-quality child care during the earliest years of life supports children's development during a critical period and efforts to support the early educator workforce are needed to ensure families with infants and toddlers have access to affordable care.

At Vanderbilt University's Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, we empower state leaders with rigorous evidence on state policies proven to improve outcomes for children, their families, and the economy. We focus on identifying state policies and programs that are backed by the most rigorous evidence available, with a particular emphasis on the policies that help children and families thrive. As a nonpartisan organization, we do not take official positions on any particular piece of legislation, and our testimony reflects the research on any given topic, rather than the views of the University.

The Importance of the Earliest Years

The infant and toddler years are the most sensitive period of brain and physical development, affecting all future learning, behavior, and health.^{1,2} Children's experiences during this time, particularly those with responsive caregivers, provide important positive stimulation and protect the developmental process from disruption due to stress.³ These interactions are fundamental to shaping brain architecture and are crucial whether children are at home with their parents or in child care.⁴

Despite the importance of early experiences, high-quality care is not available to all. Access to care is shaped by affordability and proximity of care, and many families have limited options, especially when it comes to infant and toddler care. Child care typically accounts for a substantial portion of a family's budget, approximating—and often eclipsing—the cost of housing.⁵ Lack of options for infant and toddler care is pronounced across the country, as this care is more expensive and difficult to find than care for older children.⁶

Child Care Workforce

Efforts to improve access to child care require supports for early educators, who play an essential role during the earliest years of development. However, early educators commonly earn wages that are insufficient for meeting basic needs and experience high rates of food insecurity, as well as poor mental

wellbeing.⁷ The national median wage for early educators is \$13.07 per hour—lower than 97% of all other occupations and below a living wage in every state.⁸ Those caregivers who work with infants and toddlers typically earn even lower wages than their peers who work with children aged 3 to 5.⁹ These challenges affect caregiver-child interactions and the overall quality of care, and require action to promote workforce development and retention.

In the past few years, states have acknowledged the importance of caring for the youngest children by supporting early educators in different ways. Recent research from Virginia¹⁰ and the District of Columbia¹¹ suggest that bonuses to the child care workforce reduce turnover and increase the number of early educators. Around the country, states are implementing different bonus programs to supplement early educators' wages.

- **New Mexico:** The [Infant Toddler Pay Parity Program](#) provides compensation to early educators working with infants and toddlers comparable to that of similarly qualified public school teachers.
- **North Carolina:** The [Child Care WAGES®](#) program provides biannual, education-based bonuses to early educators and directors earning up to \$23 per hour who work with children up to age 5.
- **West Virginia:** The [WV STARS Pathways to Earnings](#) program provides annual bonuses to early educators and directors working in child care programs that serve children using subsidies. Bonuses are dependent on the educator's credentials.

Considering the infant and toddler period is the most sensitive period of development, supports are needed to ensure families have access to affordable child care and early educators are supported to promote high-quality services. The 30% funding set aside has the potential to provide important and sustained funding to support compensation for early educators.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

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¹ Shonkoff, J. (2017). Breakthrough impacts: What science tells us about supporting early childhood development. *YC Young Children*, 72(2), 8–16

² National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2020). *Connecting the brain to the rest of the body: Early childhood development and lifelong health are deeply intertwined*. Working paper No. 15.
https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/wp15_health_FINALv2.pdf

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Early brain development and health.

<https://archive.cdc.gov/#/details?url=https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/early-brain-development.html>

⁴ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). *Young children develop in an environment of relationships*.

Working paper No. 1. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Young-Children-Develop-in-an-Environment-of-Relationships.pdf>

⁵ Child Care Aware of America. (2019). The US and the high price of child care: An examination of a broken system. [https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-](https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.childcareaware.org%2Four-issues%2Fresearch%2Fthe-us-and-the-high-price-of-child-care-2019%2F)

[AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.childcareaware.org%2Four-issues%2Fresearch%2Fthe-us-and-the-high-price-of-child-care-2019%2F](https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3957809/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.childcareaware.org%2Four-issues%2Fresearch%2Fthe-us-and-the-high-price-of-child-care-2019%2F)

⁶ Center for American Progress. (2018, October 31). Understanding infant and toddler child care deserts.

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/understanding-infant-toddler-child-care-deserts/>

⁷ Otten, J. J., Bradford, V. A., Stover, B., Hill, H. D., Osborne, C., Getts, K., & Seixas, N. (2019). The culture of health in early care and education: Workers' wages, health, and job characteristics. *Health Affairs*, 38(5), 709-720. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31059354/>

⁸ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2024). The early childhood educator workforce.

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2024/the-early-childhood-educator-workforce/early-educator-pay-economic-insecurity-across-the-states/>

⁹ Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2024). Early childhood workforce index – 2024.

<https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2024/executive-summary/key-findings/>

¹⁰ Bassok, D., Doromal, J. B., Michie, M., & Wong, V. C. (2021). The effects of financial incentives on teacher turnover in early childhood settings: Experimental evidence from Virginia. Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. <https://vecf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/6de6fd54-e921-4c88-a452-ad7cabccc362.pdf>

¹¹ Schochet, O. (2024). Jobs in the balance: the two-year labor market impacts of Washington, DC's early childhood educator Pay Equity Fund. *Mathematica*. <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/two-year-labor-market-impacts-of-washington-dcs-early-childhood-educator-pay-equity-fund>