



May 15, 2025

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

RE: In support of Rep Donovan's bill H5200, the Early Educator
Compensation Act

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

We write in strong support of Representative Donovan's bill to help address the
early educator workforce staffing crisis in Rhode Island.

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 and nutrition services, we
provide vital early learning programs across the birth to 5 continua, including
family home visiting, early intervention, Early Head Start, Head Start, child care,
and Pre-K. For the families with whom we work, over 90% are earning less than
the federal poverty level. Our Pre-K, child care and Head Start classrooms are a
lifeline that enables the parents to go to work each day and strive for a better
future for their children.

As Rhode Island rebuilds from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing children
with greater challenges – making the job of teaching our youngest children even
harder and more important. At the same time, we are facing a significant staffing
crisis. Due to years of underinvestment in these programs by the state, we struggle
to hire assistants and teachers. In fact, we recently celebrated the grand opening of
a new site at the Tempo building in Providence but do not have enough staff to
open all classrooms.

Representative Donovan's bill would fund several initiatives to encourage current
staff to remain in the field which the system desperately needs. We especially
support investments in continuing the WAGE\$ program that has a proven track
record of improving retention of credentialed early educators. Wage supplements
for front line teachers are a worthwhile investment for Rhode Island to make in
our children.

We urge you to pass this bill – the staffing crisis is not showing signs of lessening,
and our children deserve to have access to the services we want to be able to
provide.

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David Caprio
President and
Chief Executive Officer

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,



David Caprio
President and CEO