



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

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Office of the Director

Kimberly Merolla-Brito

May 15, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, 02903

RE: H5200 – An Act Relating to Education – Rhode Island Early Educator Workforce Act

Dear Chair Abney:

I am writing to you regarding House Bill S5200, which aims to strengthen and sustain the early childhood education workforce by funding scholarships, apprenticeships, and compensation programs for early educators across the state. While the proposal's goals may appear to align with the work of the RI Department of Human Services (DHS), I am sharing additional information and context for the committee's consideration.

Since 2017, DHS has allocated consistent funding to the TEACH Early Childhood program, which provides needed scholarships to help early educators earn credentials and degrees while continuing to work. On average, DHS has invested approximately \$750,000 per year to support eight TEACH pathways and the Registered Apprenticeship program, which collectively help early educators earn more credentials that eventually leads to increased earning potential. Importantly, DHS has secured ARPA SFRF funds to support TEACH through March 2026 and will be actively reviewing data on program participation and pathway selection to inform future investments.

Another way the early childhood education workforce is being supported is through the WAGES\$ program. This program builds on the TEACH and apprenticeship program by boosting early educator compensation and retention with education-based salary supplements. This has been supported for the past two years through Preschool Development Grant funding with additional funding expected to sustain the initiative at a minimum of \$1 million per year through 2028.

We appreciate the committee's attention to this matter. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito".

Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director
RI Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance

The Honorable Representative Susan R. Donovan
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy