

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Mary Castrignano, and I am the Director at Tots Town Inc. Child Care Center.

I am probably the smallest center in the state, with a capacity for 14 children, but a fantastic center! I have been open since 1990. Without the pandemic money's help, I would have been out of business. My staff and I receive the Pandemic Retention Bonus and Step Up to WAGE\$. The money my staff receives through them is a considerable help and helps me professionally, keeping me able to meet my financial needs. I need these programs to continue to survive. Your commitment to getting these programs to continue would be greatly appreciated.

The money we received helped my staff and me financially. And my daycare/preschool program was able to continue. Since my center is so small, doing a fundraiser with families to earn extra money and participating in them is hard.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Mary Castrignano

Director

Tots Town Inc. Child Care Center

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Lillian Brietzke, and I am a Teacher at Sunshine Child Development Center.

I am an early childhood educator because these children are the future. Learning to build social-emotional relationships, building the foundations of math, science, and reading, and caring for them is how we build the society and the future we want to see. Educated citizens begin developing as young as my infant classroom. On top of that, well-staffed childcare centers allow parents to go to work while their children receive care.

The WAGE\$ program has allowed me to further my early childhood education by having a little extra for my schooling. It's so hard to find staff right now, let alone qualified staff, so the supplements allow us to work towards more knowledge and qualifications in the field.

This field is so important. Without early childhood educators and childcare workers, many people wouldn't be able to go to work. Having a "village" isn't as common as it once was, and childcare workers and educators become that village for the families they work with. My families ask me to babysit and ask for my advice and input. They tell me about their struggles with their children and in their lives. We are caregivers to their children. We need to help the field grow, not make it impossible for people to continue their jobs, survive, and pay the bills. Without childcare, the workforce will suffer.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Lillian Brietzke

Teacher

Sunshine Child Development Center

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Victoria Ballou, and I am a Teacher at Dr. Daycare North Providence.

The Step Up to WAGE\$ program has financially helped me as a lead preschool teacher. I have also supported my classroom in small ways that help build up my children and their development. Having an extra income helps me feel reassured in my position as a daycare educator. These programs and grants have changed my world. And I am grateful.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Victoria Ballou

Teacher

Dr. Daycare North Providence

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Indigo Bethea, and I am a Teacher, Owner, and Family Child Care Provider at Indigo's Kids: A Homeschooling Adventure.

I am an early childhood educator primarily because I wanted to homeschool my own children. My goal is to give them a world-class education that allows them to navigate the adult world of literacy, mathematics, the sciences, languages, and cultures. Along the way, I realized I loved teaching young minds and wanted to provide other families with the same opportunities I had given my children. As a result, I now have a school full of emerging readers. And that ability extends from my 2-year-old students up to my 4-year-old students. My two children have been excellent peer instructors in helping the younger students understand the joy and value of reading. They are great leaders who help us think about all the forces that make our natural and social world spin.

The pandemic took a significant toll on all of us, and I am no exception. In my case, I went from being married and having a stable income to suddenly becoming a single mother/head of household. I was utterly nervous because I'm well aware of the feminization of poverty, especially as a mother of young children of color. The pandemic bonuses helped me stabilize during this highly turbulent period. Unexpectedly, two of my families went through their own financial (non-divorce) difficulties. I survived that problematic period thanks to the WAGES program. I do not live above my means; however, without those extra funds, I would have drowned.

I plan to expand my school to offer more high-quality early education to young students, especially those of color. I want every child in RI starting school already reading, writing, understanding math, and being aware of the rest of the world and its cultural and scientific place. And I will need all the financial resources and skills to make it happen. This is RI's vision for future generations, right?

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Indigo Bethea

Teacher, Owner, and Family Child Care Provider

Indigo's Kids: A Homeschooling Adventure

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Nilda Cancel, and I am a Teacher's Assistant at EBCAP.

I am an early childhood educator and have been doing this for over 20 years. Children this early need people to look up to, learn from, and grow with, believing they can succeed in everything they put their minds to. I have my children, and I am also a foster mom. I love giving and showing that I'm there for them because they need to be surrounded by adults who care for them and are positive.

I consider myself grateful and very blessed. Five years ago, an unexpected event touched my life. I was told I had cancer, and I lost a lot of things, including employment. I went through chemotherapy, operations, and radiation. It was one of the hardest things that happened to me. Too many worries, depression, and wondering how I am going to get back on my feet entered my life. I had to stop being a foster mom because I became sick. I was never knocked down to nothing. I started caring for myself and improving until the doctor told me I could work again. Sure enough, my heart was in my passion - the children. I applied to get work, started working, and was offered these programs, which became financially helpful. I've become more stable financially through these programs and could not imagine my life without them.

This program, Step Up to WAGE\$, is essential to so many and allows me to enjoy what I do even more: to be an educator and be there for someone.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Nilda Cancel

Teacher's Assistant

ECCAP

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Katherine Bailey, and I am a Teacher at Mount Hope Childcare.

I have been a teacher since I was 18, and I am now 51 years old. The pay has always been poor, but it is a very rewarding career. These programs (WAGE\$ Supplement) have helped me and my family with our financial needs.

We need more money – we are caring for other children, and it is a huge responsibility.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Katherine Bailey

Teacher

Mount Hope Childcare

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Sarah Carr, and I am a Director and Education Coordinator at Coggeshall Club.

There are so many reasons why I am an early childhood educator. The ability to foster the learning and love of learning in children is a self-rewarding position. Knowing that I am giving these children the future of our nation and the tools they need to set them up for success is an incredible feeling. I love what I do and have gotten to my current administrative position to help others who feel the same way grow as educators.

These programs have helped me and my educators tremendously. So many of them are young educators working toward their goals and dreams as they allow the children they teach to do the same. While I would give them everything I could, unfortunately, this profession in this economy does not pay what it should. My teachers provide everything to their students despite their financial stresses. The WAGE\$ program has relieved these teachers (and me!) to help us stay on our feet so we can put all our energy and focus into what we do.

As said above, these programs have made an enormous difference in helping educators financially, especially in a demanding field that does not compensate as it should. I recently moved from MA to teach in RI, where I went to school, and am struggling to find a house in this market. These retention bonuses have helped add a good chunk to my savings toward a house so I can remain in RI teaching for the foreseeable future.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Sarah Carr

Director and Education Coordinator

Coggeshall Club

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Brittany Bergeron, and I am the Director at My Learning Tree.

I have been an early educator since my son was born 6 weeks early. It took a lot for me to put him in daycare when he turned 7 months old, but I knew a family friend working at a center and trusted her. They had an opening a few months later, and I haven't looked back since. My son is now 7 and in 1st grade. I have two other children, who are now 5 and 2, who attend the same school that I have continued to work for for over 7 years.

The CCAP grant helped me pay for childcare for two of my children, especially when I was promoted to director and my DHS copay went up. Step UP to WAGE\$ ran out of grant money, but I was accepted. The money offered would have helped me move to help my son's healing journey. Please continue to fund this program - it helps more than you know.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Brittany Bergeron

Director

My Learning Tree

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Bethany Bucolo, and I am a Teacher at Countryside Children's Center.

I have worked in Early Education for about 20 years (I briefly explored other paths, but after my daughter was born, I returned to Daycare). After deciding this was a career I enjoyed, I went to school for Early Childhood (CCRI). I genuinely enjoy my job and love my "kids" immensely.

The programs above allowed me to have less financial stress. Because of Step Up to WAGE\$, I could save for an emergency. The money makes it easier to provide for my daughter and me regarding medical matters and clothing for the changing seasons. The funds we receive are greatly appreciated and needed. Everyone I work with who gets the funds puts the money towards something "need"- not a "want."

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Bethany Bucolo

Teacher

Countryside Children's Center

May 15th, 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am in strong support of House Finance Bill H5200, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

My name is Kerrilynn Baker, and I am a Teacher's Assistant at CHILD INC.

I love what I do and making an impact on young children's lives, who are simply low income or even gone through trauma. My job, I feel, is thankless but appreciated at the same time. Fortunately, there isn't enough money in the field, and many people venture into other workforces because, economically, people need to make more money.

The WAGE\$ grants and supplements helped me stay where I am and meet my bills. People in this field must make a living to continue enjoying what they do and staying in the field they love.

Early educators are needed to make a difference in these young lives. We are the most overworked and underpaid, yet so necessary for the workforce in these children.

I want to thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. **PLEASE PASS THIS BILL.**

Kerrilynn Baker

Teacher's Assistant

CHILD INC