

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 Yasmin Mola Fernandez, and I am a Teacher's Assistant at Children's Friend.

I've been working as a teaching assistant for five years now. Also, I'm currently a CCRI student in my last semester in the education field. I love working as a teacher because I like helping families in need and seeing the children grow each year in their educational development. My next goal is to attend URI and obtain a bachelor's degree in education/languages.

I currently work two jobs: a teacher assistant and waitressing at least once a week to help with my bills. I live alone, and everything is up to me. I also go to school and pay for books and other stuff. The financial assistance has helped me with bills, books, and other things needed.

The wage supplements have helped me and all my coworkers. We are very appreciative of it. Please continue this program.

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

Yasmin Mola Fernandez

Teacher's Assistant

Children's Friend

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 Latoya Clement, and I am a Teacher at Roger Williams Daycare Center.

I have been working at the RWDCC for 15 years, and I like working with children because I enjoy teaching them to improve. We know they are like sponges and can remember and grow to improve. Children learn a lot in the first 5 years of their lives, and at times, they shock me. At the same time, as a teacher, they are learning what I'm teaching them, and I am glad to be a part of their lives as a teacher and parent.

The Step Up to WAGE\$ salary supplements I have received have helped me financially because we, as teachers, don't make much money. We are the foundation of education for young children. I am happy that I could receive these funds from this program because it also helps me buy food, as the world is changing and the cost of living is increasing. Being out of work during COVID-19, I was making more money at home collecting unemployment than working. As teachers in the daycare world, we do a lot, and I feel like, at times, we are not recognized as necessary. I appreciate all the help I am getting, so thank you.

These programs are a big help; we, as teachers, also struggle to pay bills for medical and other things in life.

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

Latoya Clement

Teacher

Roger Williams Daycare 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 Paula Costa, and I am an Education Coordinator at Stork's Nest Child Academy.

I have been employed at Stork's Nest Child Academy for 26 years. I was the site director for the East Greenwich location for 24 years and am currently the Education Coordinator. I have been in education for over 32 years and have loved every minute of it. I love working with children and helping guide teachers to help each child reach important milestones.

Since COVID, there has been a change in employment. It has become increasingly challenging to find educated teachers who want to be in the early childhood field. COVID hit, and different jobs were created in which people could work from home, make money on their phones, or be their own boss. Besides the new job opportunities, many work industries needed employees and started offering higher pay and bonuses. We couldn't compete with some of the pay being offered. We have lost many great teachers who left the field for a job in a different field, offering more pay. We have changed our benefits and our salary scale, but it doesn't seem to be enough. The Step Up to WAGE\$ program is so beneficial to our teachers. These programs were the reason we could keep many of our qualified teachers.

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

Paula Costa

Education Coordinator

Stork's Nest Child Academy

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 Jennifer Crookes, and I am a Teacher's Assistant at East Bay Community Action Program - Head Start.

I love making a difference in the lives of children. Our program has always tried to keep up with the competitive wages of other early childhood programs. We have always tried to make staff feel safe to voice their concerns. This, as well as these continued programs, are essential to the childcare industry. Please continue to fund the WAGE\$ program.

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

Jennifer Crookes

Teacher's Assistant

East Bay Community Action Program - Head Start

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 Mariela Clavijo, and I am a Teacher at Cranston Child Development Center.

I am an early childhood educator who loves working with families and children. The first five years, from birth to age 5, are crucial in a child's development. I make a difference by providing my students with a safe and nurturing environment. I love the relationships I have built throughout the years. I love watching my students grow and preparing them for kindergarten and the real world. I love to make a difference by providing my students with experiences and support in social, emotional, and cognitive skills.

The financial supplements helped decrease some student loan debts as well as help put extra money in my pocket since the economy is increasing, and in early childhood education, we still need to see more salary increases.

Please revisit the WAGE\$ salary supplement program and provide early childhood educators with wages to keep them in beneficial and crucial programs, especially in the first years of a child's development. We make a difference in our families' lives by providing them with resources and working collaboratively with families to benefit the whole child.

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

Mariela Clavijo

Teacher

Cranston 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 Cheryl, and I am a Teacher and Education Coordinator at Acorn Academy.

Every day, I wake up and am grateful to work in a field I have loved for over 25 years. Nothing else comes to mind when I think of what else I would do with my life. With every fiber of my being, I am an early childhood educator. Since the pandemic, I have encountered more children with anxiety and spectrum disorders. These children have sensory overload and require extra love and attention daily. The preschoolers whom I work with today are the "Pandemic babies." Parents and children alike were very stressed, which has become evident in the classroom as we see more disruptive, emotional, and aggressive behavioral outbursts. My job is to ensure these children feel safe, loved, and heard.

As an over-50-year-old cancer survivor and single woman, the financial supplements allowed me to pay some bills without extra stress and replace some broken appliances. They also allowed me to help with my daughter's wedding this past fall.

It is evident in all of the research that RI early childhood educators are paid less than many other fields. If it weren't for us, many people would not have been able to return to work so quickly during the pandemic. If not for us, people could not work without caring for their precious little ones. It is my honor, daily privilege, and pleasure to supply this service. However, as an educator with a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in early childhood education, my salary is way below the cost of living standards. It is far beneath other women in other fields who achieved such postgraduate degrees!

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

Cheryl

Teacher and Education Coordinator

Acorn Academy

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 Katelyn Crudale, and I am a Teacher's Assistant at Children's Learning Express.

When I became a mom, I was flooded with worries and different things I was scared about regarding my children. One was childcare; you hear all these horror stories. I wanted to be the person the parents felt safe enough to go to work, go to school, and handle their day-to-day life, knowing worrying about their child's safety wouldn't have to be a concern with me and my coworkers being the caretakers. I love being a teacher and watching these babies grow from 6 weeks until they go off to kindergarten. I am now pursuing my degree in ECE and plan to specialize in special education to continue being a safe place for all children.

As everyone knows, daycare workers and teachers are not paid the big bucks. With the Step Up to WAGE\$ program, I could keep my family's head above water, keep up with my bills, and provide my classroom with extra materials and toys for the children. It's beyond helpful to have a little extra when you need it.

We aren't just daycare teachers but mothers, caretakers, and family members. We do not do our job for the pay - we do it because we love what we do. However, financially, the minimum wage is not livable. The programs in question help with more than just "pocket money." We can catch up on bills, supply classrooms, etc.

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

Katelyn Crudale

Teacher's Assistant

Children's Learning Express

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 Margaret Donovan, and I am a Teacher at the Dr. Pat Fienstein Child Development Center.

I can play different roles at my center because of my education and life experience. This job allows me to be a working mother and do work I am passionate about, providing for my community. With better financial compensation, I can be more flexible in my job. For example, I can take open shifts or provide additional coverage when needed because I am not trying to leave this job to get to my next job. This results in reliable service for the families served at my center. I am also able to provide more opportunities for my own children. The financial help allowed me to send my own child to a sleep-away camp last summer.

As a part-time employee, I am very grateful for the supplements that were available to both part-time AND full-time employees. Please continue this program.

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

Mary Margaret Donovan

Teacher

Dr. Pat Fienstein 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 Claudia Cook, and I am a Teacher at EBCAP Pre-K Forest Ave.

I am a Head Start preschool teacher who likes working with young children. I have been doing this for 25 years and believe that parent involvement and love for school begins in preschool.

With this extra money, I enrolled in school to complete my bachelor's degree and keep my job as a lead teacher. The extra money has helped me pay for my household's student loans, electricity, and oil.

Although working with young children is very rewarding, it is also exhausting. Classroom teachers are 100% responsible for just about everything, from children's learning to the safety and welfare of the whole classroom and meeting expectations (ECERS-CLASS-Professional development-IEP's-Assessments). After being in a classroom for six hours nonstop, teachers feel physically and mentally exhausted, only to have to do aftercare. Because of this, teachers are constantly sick and calling out. There is a lack of subs because agencies can only afford to pay them so much. In return, teachers are left with less help and more stress. Since most teachers make very small wages, it is easy to transfer to other jobs where they can get paid more and have fewer responsibilities, stress, and demands. Early childhood teachers feel underappreciated and often referred to as babysitters. They don't see the importance of high-quality classrooms and well-educated teachers in this field. Please continue to fund WAGE\$; it helps ECE teachers to survive financially.

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

Claudia Cook

Teacher

EBCAP Pre-K Forest Ave

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 Michelle Crespo, and I am an Education Coordinator at Love4All.

I love working with children and want to advocate for them and make a difference for them, one child at a time!

Educators in the field of early childhood education do not get paid much. We get paid less than teachers in the school department, but we have more roles and responsibilities. However, we get paid a bare minimum wage. As early childhood educators, we live paycheck to paycheck and struggle every week. The Step Up to WAGE\$ program has helped tremendously in catching up on bills and saving money on childcare prices.

I want to advocate for more support and better wages in the early childhood field. I was denied the Step Up to WAGE\$ due to income, but I have worked hard to get my master's degree, and those funds would have helped pay some of my school loans. Everyone with a degree should have qualified for the Step Up to WAGE\$ program.

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

Michelle Crespo

Education Coordinator

Love4All