



Testimony Re: H-5196, Child Care for Child Care Educators & EI Staff (RI Works)
House Finance Committee
May 22, 2025
Leanne Barrett, Director of Early Childhood Policy & Strategy



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that will help families with young children.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support Representative Grace Diaz's Child Care for Child Care Educators & Early Intervention Staff bill, H-5196, which would continue a proven program that is helping to recruit and retain staff in child care and early learning programs. We also strongly support the proposal to expand the program to allow higher income early educators to participate (as is done in Kentucky) and to make staff of Early Intervention programs eligible to help recruit and retain qualified EI staff and reduce the waiting list for Early Intervention services.

As you may remember, Speaker Shekarchi introduced a budget amendment to fund this program as a \$4 million pilot from August 2023 – July 2024 along with \$3 million in funding to address the staffing crisis in Head Start and Early Head Start which caused classrooms to close. The Head Start and Early Head Start funding was included in the Governor's FY25 and FY26 proposed budgets but unfortunately, he did not include the Child Care for Child Care Educators program in either his FY25 or FY26 budget proposal. Last year, the General Assembly continued the Child Care for Child Care Educators program in the final enacted budget, so it continued into a second year.

The Department of Human Services successfully launched the Child Care for Child Care Educators program in August 2023 and has managed it for nearly two years. It has been a remarkable success. **Almost half of the licensed early learning centers and about 5% of the licensed family child care homes in the state had at least one staff member participating.**

This strategy Kentucky established to cover the cost of child care for all child care staff has also been recommended by the [federal government](#) and the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) to help address the staffing crises in child care and early learning programs. Rhode Island has [gotten national attention for adopting this strategy as a pioneering state](#).

This bill would make the program permanent, remove the family income limit to help more middle-income staff receive the benefit (Kentucky does not have a family income limit in their program), and make frontline staff in Early Intervention programs eligible. Early Intervention still has several vacant staff positions and a waiting list as of March 2025 of 132 infants and toddlers with developmental challenges.

The federal government has clearly stated that federal Child Care Development Block Grant funds can be used to fund this benefit for child care and early educators who are part of families that exceed the current family income federal limit (85% of State Median Income) – by considering early educators as a “protected population” and reviewing each case to determine that child care is not affordable to the family (e.g., would consume more than 7% of family income).

Enabling staff with higher family incomes to qualify for this benefit would directly help child care programs. Child care and early learning programs shouldn't have to search for individuals in low-income families to staff child care programs. Programs should not be incentivized to keep staff wages low so teachers with children can qualify.

Child Care Provider Comments on DHS Survey:

- *“We have gotten many more applicants who are looking to bring their child with them to work. It has really given us an opportunity to appropriately staff our center.”*
- *“This has been life changing for parents with small children to go back to work. We have truly benefited from this program as staff want to stay and work where their child attends.”*
- *“This has been an amazing experience. We were able to attract a top-notch toddler teacher who had chosen to stay home because the cost of child care was too high in comparison to her income.”*
- *“This pilot program is financially supporting our staff with young children, allowing them to work in a field that otherwise does not pay well. They are full of energy and a great asset to our program. I hope this program will continue to support the staff so they will continue to work in childcare.”*

Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and TANF funding can be used to continue this program. In fact, last year the CCDBG allocation to Rhode Island was permanently increased by \$1.8 million and then the recent federal CR budget provided another \$582,000 in child care funding for Rhode Island. Without General Assembly action this successful program will end. It has been a critical and effective component of state efforts to address the staffing crisis in early care and education. A statewide child care organization reported in February that 20% of their classrooms were closed because they cannot find and keep staff – ending the Child Care for Child Care Educators program will make staffing challenges worse.

We know that 9 out of 10 families in Rhode Island cannot afford the cost of quality, child care – **we should start with making sure the staff of our early childhood programs get the help they need so they can come to work every day to care for and educate other people's children.**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and for Representative Diaz's leadership on this issue.

Roshona's Story: Make the Child Care for Child Care Educators Program Permanent to Help Early Educators Statewide



My name is Roshona Perry, and **I am a teacher at Joyful Noise Inc. in West Warwick.**

I work as an early childhood educator because I want to be a massive part of our future. I love what I do and that I have such a critical part in the future of our children and the next generation. My students are like my children, and I want to do what is best for each and every one of them.

I am a mom to a smart, outgoing 1-year-old. I recently had the opportunity to allow my son to attend child care because of the Rhode Island Child Care for Child Care educators program enacted in 2023 and extended in 2024. **Before the program, my son was staying with a family member because I could not afford the cost of child care myself.** I am lucky enough to have some help, but I always hit a crossroads when one of my helpers was sick or couldn't take him. That caused me to call out of work and miss out on pay or use sick time.

With the Child Care for Child Care Educators program, I got to send my son to the early learning center where I work and where he has FLOURISHED. I would be DEVASTATED if my son couldn't attend the center anymore if this program ends in July 2025 as currently scheduled in state law. The price for care is so high that I would be working just to be able to send my son to child care, leaving me with little to nothing to pay my bills and afford groceries and other things my son needs.

The programs have helped me greatly, and I'm sure they have helped others. If I couldn't send my son to child care, I don't know if I could stay at my job, and we need all the child care workers we can get. This is for the future. Think about the future when you make the decisions for the next step.



CHILD CARE: THE BACKBONE OF A STRONG STATE ECONOMY

Two Key Child Care Priorities for Governor's FY26 Budget

Businesses lose money when they can't find staff and when their employees don't show up to work. Parents' inability to access and afford reliable, quality child care contributes to the statewide labor shortage, particularly in female-dominated jobs in health care, education, human services, and hospitality. **We ask Governor McKee to strongly consider including two proposals in his FY26 budget proposal to stabilize and strengthen access to child care.** Both proposals have widespread national and state support, minimal budget impact, and would significantly help families with young children.

1) Remove Regressive Requirement from the Child Care Assistance Program

Trust moms to make the decision about whether to pursue child support. Participation in Child Support Enforcement Rhode Island state law requires that applicants participate in Child Support Enforcement as an eligibility requirement for Child Care Assistance. We should trust moms to make the decision about whether to pursue child support. Participation in Child Support Enforcement is not required to qualify for any other early care and education programs. Most states never had this requirement in place, and almost all of those that did have removed it. There are only 9 states that currently impose this requirement - Connecticut stopped in 2006, New York stopped in 2009, and Mississippi stopped in 2023. National experts strongly recommend that states that have this requirement in place remove it, stating "there is no evidence to suggest that child support enforcement in child care subsidy processes helps families gain access to additional funds to improve their financial security."

2) Make the Child Care for Child Care Educators Program Permanent

An effective strategy to recruit and retain early educators statewide, the Rhode Island Child Care for Child Care Educators program began in August 2023 and covers the cost of child care for qualifying staff who work in child care programs. **Nearly half of the licensed child care and early learning centers in the state have at least one staff person participating.** Rhode Island has been a pioneering state in adopting this strategy which is expanding across the country. Recommended by the federal government and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Rhode Island has received positive attention at both the [national level](#) and [local level](#) for this program.

Supported By

American Academy of Pediatrics RI, Beautiful Beginnings, Brown Fox Point ECE Center, Business Owners of Childcare Assn., C.H.I.L.D., Inc., Child & Family, Children's Friend, Comprehensive Community Action, Dr. Daycare Early Learning Centers, East Bay Community Action, Economic Progress Institute, Estefany Ortiz Home Daycare, Family Caregiver Alliance of RI, Federal Hill House, Genesis Center, Joyful Noise, Kids Klub, Latino Policy Institute, LISC Rhode Island, Magic Years Child Care, Meeting Street, National Education Association RI, Newport Chamber of Commerce, Our Journ3i LLC, Over the Rainbow Learning Centers, Parents Leading for Educational Equity, Precious Years Nursery, Reach Out and Read RI, Rhode Island AFL-CIO, RI Alliance for YMCAs, RI Association for Infant Mental Health, RI Association for the Education of Young Children, RI Child Care Directors Association, RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence, RI Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, RI Head Start Association, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, SEIU 1199 NE, Sunshine Child Development Center, Sweet Peas Village, The Learning Garden Children's Center, Women's Fund of RI, Woonsocket Head Start, ZERO TO THREE