



Rhode Island Association for the
Education of Young Children



Right from the
Start

Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

I am writing to voice my support for **HB7317: An Act Relating To Education -- Rhode Island Early Educator Workforce Act**, which would continue funding for WAGE\$, which provides education-based salary supplements to center-based educators and family childcare providers working with children in an early childhood setting.

My name is Essence Clark, and I am a Pre-K Teacher's Assistant at Smith Hill Early Learning Center. The wage supplement has helped me financially by providing more income stability and reducing stress. It has made it easier to cover basic expenses and has made me feel more secure in my career.

For the children, it means they have a more focused and consistent teacher, which supports their development. For the early childhood community, it helps with staff retention and shows that our work is valuable.

Maintaining the program contributes to lower staff turnover, enhances educator retention, and ensures more consistent care for children. When teachers feel financially appreciated and secure, they are more inclined to remain in their positions, seek professional growth, and provide quality education. Maintaining the WAGE\$ Supplement program strengthens educators, benefits children through stable relationships, and supports the long-term health of the early childhood community.

Sincerely,

Essence Clark