



To: House Committee on Finance

From: RI Association for Infant Mental Health (RIAIMH), Leanne Barrett, Executive Director

Date: April 28, 2026

Subject: Support for H-7327 (Donovan), *RI Early Educator Workforce Act*

RIAIMH is a non-profit professional membership organization that works to ensure all infants and young children in RI thrive and have strong, positive, responsive relationships with their parents and other caregivers. RIAIMH has been an active member of the Right from the Start Campaign's Steering Committee since its inception.

We are writing to support passage of H-7317, the RI Early Educator Workforce Act which requires cross-agency collaboration (RIDE and DHS) to support recruitment, development, and retention of skilled early educators. The bill specifically recognizes the value of the *T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood* workforce development program which has been operating for 15 years, the *RI Early Educator Apprenticeship Program*, and the *Child Care WAGE\$ program*. All three of these programs are part of the essential infrastructure needed to keep our early care and education system operational statewide and to ensure that young children in Rhode Island have consistent, nurturing, skilled early educators regardless of family income or zip code and across child care, Head Start, and state Pre-K.

The mental health of young children depends on consistent and nurturing relationships with parents and other caregivers (**particularly child care educators who often care for children 10 or more hours per day – much of a child's waking life**). Positive social emotional development in the context of healthy relationships is a necessary foundation for young children to succeed and thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We are thankful for your continued leadership on issues related to child and family well-being and early care and education.