



Woonsocket Head Start
Child Development Association, Inc.

204 Warwick Street
Woonsocket, RI 02895
401.769.1850
401.769.1854
www.whscda.org



Chair Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee,

RE: Support for H7317 – Early Educator Workforce Act

On behalf of the Rhode Island Head Start Association, we write in strong support of H7317, the Early Educator Workforce Act.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs across Rhode Island serve some of our state's most vulnerable children and families, providing comprehensive early education, health, nutrition, and family support services. These programs are a critical foundation for school readiness and long-term success, particularly for children experiencing poverty and other systemic barriers.

However, like many early childhood providers, Head Start programs are facing a severe workforce crisis. Chronic underinvestment has resulted in low wages and limited career advancement opportunities for early educators, making it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff. Programs are struggling to maintain full enrollment and, in some cases, are forced to reduce classrooms or services due to staffing shortages.

H7317 represents a meaningful and necessary investment in the early childhood workforce. By supporting initiatives such as wage supplements and retention strategies, this legislation will help stabilize the workforce and ensure that experienced, qualified educators remain in the field. These investments are essential not only for educators, but for the children and families who rely on consistent, high-quality early learning environments.

Additionally, expanding access to voluntary, free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs—aligned with the Head Start model—will strengthen Rhode Island's mixed-delivery system and increase opportunities for children ages three and four to benefit from early learning experiences that prepare them for success in school and beyond.

We urge the Committee to pass H7317 and make a sustained commitment to the early childhood workforce. Investing in early educators is an investment in Rhode Island's children, families, and future prosperity.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of Rhode Island's youngest learners.

Sincerely,

Mary Varr

Executive Director WHSCDA

on behalf of the Rhode Island Head Start Association