



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 R. Peckham and I am a Lead Pre-K Teacher and Toddler Coordinator at Twice as Nice Early Learning Center. The wage supplement has benefited me significantly and made a meaningful difference both personally and professionally. It has helped provide financial stability in a field where compensation often does not reflect the level of skill, education, and responsibility required. On a personal level, it has relieved some financial stress and allowed me to focus more fully on my work instead of constantly worrying about finances. As someone who is currently pregnant, the supplement also allowed me to purchase a reliable car, which has been incredibly important for my safety, my growing family, and my ability to consistently get to and from work.

In the classroom, the impact is just as important. When educators feel more supported financially, it directly affects the quality of care and education we provide. We are more present, more patient, and more intentional in our teaching. It also supports consistency for children, as financial incentives like this can help reduce staff turnover, which is critical for building strong, secure relationships in early childhood settings.

For the early childhood community as a whole, the supplement sends a powerful message that this work matters. It acknowledges that early educators are professionals who deserve fair compensation. That said, while the supplement is incredibly helpful, it is not a complete solution. It feels temporary and does not address the larger, ongoing issue of low base wages in the field.

So yes, the supplement has helped in very real and meaningful ways, and it is imperative that it continues. At the same time, there must be a long-term, sustainable solution to the pay crisis in early childhood education—one that ensures educators are paid fairly without relying on temporary supplements.

I strongly believe the WAGE\$ Supplement program should continue, and that it is more important now than ever.

This program has made a real and meaningful difference in my life and in my work as an early childhood educator. It has provided financial support in a field where compensation often does not reflect the level of experience, education, and responsibility required. Because of this supplement, I've been able to feel more stable financially and stay focused on providing high-quality care and education. It has even allowed me to make important life decisions, like purchasing a reliable car while preparing for a growing family.

More importantly, the impact goes far beyond individual educators. When teachers are supported, children benefit directly. Consistent, experienced educators create stronger relationships, more stable classrooms, and more intentional teaching. Without that support, the field continues to struggle with burnout and turnover, and our children ultimately feel the effects. Right now, the reality is that early childhood education is underfunded and undervalued, and our children are being done a disservice because the workforce supporting them is not being adequately supported.

WAGE\$ is a critical step in the right direction. It helps retain experienced educators, encourages professional growth, and acknowledges the importance of this work. At the same time, it cannot be the only solution. The entire field needs sustained investment, including higher base wages and long-term systemic support, so that educators are not relying on supplemental programs to make ends meet.

Overall, WAGE\$ should absolutely continue. It is an essential support for educators and a necessary investment in children. With continued funding and thoughtful improvements, it can be part of a larger, much-needed effort to strengthen the early childhood workforce and ensure that children receive the quality care and education they deserve.

I want funders to understand that this wage supplement is not just helpful—it is essential.

Early childhood educators are doing critically important work during the most important years of a child's development, yet the field continues to be underpaid and undervalued. The WAGE\$ supplement helps bridge that gap in a very real way. It allows educators like me to stay in the field, continue our education, and remain focused on providing high-quality care without constantly worrying about financial instability.

In my own experience, this supplement has had a direct impact on my life. It has provided a level of financial stability that made it possible for me to make responsible, necessary decisions, like purchasing a reliable car while preparing for a growing family. That kind of stability matters—not just for me, but for the children and families I serve every day.

When educators are supported, children benefit. Stable, experienced teachers create consistent, nurturing environments where children can build relationships, feel safe, and truly learn. Without support like this, the field faces high turnover, burnout, and a loss of experienced educators, which ultimately impacts the quality of care children receive. Right now, our children are being done a disservice because the workforce supporting them is stretched too thin and not adequately compensated.

This supplement is a powerful investment in both educators and children. It helps retain qualified professionals, supports ongoing education and certification, and strengthens the overall quality of early childhood programs. However, it is also clear that this cannot be the only solution. Continued and increased funding is necessary, along with broader efforts to raise base wages across the field.

I would urge funders to see this program as a critical piece of a larger solution. Supporting early childhood educators is supporting children, families, and communities. The return on that investment is long-term and far-reaching, and programs like WAGE\$ are a vital step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

R. Peckham