

April 27, 2026

**Testimony in Support of HB-7680 (Early Childhood Workforce)**

**Subject: FOR HB-7680**

Dear Chair Abney and Esteemed Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Dr. Alison Tovar, and I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the Brown University School of Public Health, where my research focuses on nutrition, child development, and health equity in early childhood. I write in strong support of HB-7680, sponsored by Representative Donovan, which would strengthen support for Rhode Island's early childhood workforce.

The early childhood workforce is the foundation of every other ambition we have for young children in this state. Whether the goal is school readiness, healthy nutrition and physical activity, social-emotional development, or family support, none of it is possible without skilled, stable, and supported educators and caregivers.

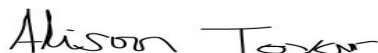
My research over the past 15 years has involved close partnerships with early care and education programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, family child care homes, and center-based programs across Rhode Island. Across all of these settings, I have seen the same pattern. Educators and providers are deeply committed to the children and families they serve. They want to provide healthy meals, rich learning experiences, and responsive care. But they are working within a system characterized by low wages, limited benefits, high turnover, and overwhelming workloads. Even straightforward, evidence-based health promotion work — like improving feeding practices or expanding active play — is difficult to implement when providers are exhausted, understaffed, and facing constant economic pressure.

Workforce instability is not just a labor issue; it is a child health and child development issue. Children thrive when they have consistent, well-supported relationships with their caregivers. When educators are forced to leave the field due to inadequate compensation or burnout, children, families, and communities all bear the cost.

HB-7680 acknowledges this reality and takes meaningful steps to invest in the people doing this essential work. I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB-7680.

Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



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