

Testimony in Support of HB-5497  
Early Childhood Mental Health Hub  
House Committee on Health and Human Services  
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**The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative Fogarty's HB-5497**, which requires the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to establish three-year pilot program for an early childhood mental health hub focused on improving access to infant and early childhood mental health services for children under the age of six and their families.

Rhode Island children and families need access to the necessary resources to create strong foundations for their children's social-emotional well-being. Many young children are experiencing significant mental health challenges that interfere with daily activities and negatively impact their opportunities to thrive. The number of young children enrolled in Medicaid presenting with serious emotional disturbance has grown from 12% in 2017 to 20% in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

In 2022, the General Assembly passed the "Infant and Early Childhood Mental Wellness Act," which directed EOHHS to create an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health task force to develop a plan to strengthen the early childhood mental health care system equitably throughout Rhode Island. This plan was completed in June of 2023 and had 10 recommendations for improving the mental health needs of Rhode Island's youngest children.<sup>2</sup> One of the key recommendations of this taskforce was to develop a Rhode Island Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub to build capacity to train and support professionals in providing evidence-based and culturally responsive therapies to screen, evaluate, and treat mental health challenges in young children.

This pilot would train and support infant and early childhood mental health professionals to adopt and implement evidence-based practices; maintain a registry of professionals and help connect families to services; monitor availability of services, new recommendations, and advancements in therapies; and make annual recommendations to Medicaid and behavioral health systems to address persistent gaps in coverage and care.

The Early Childhood Mental Health Hub pilot program would centralize, support, and build capacity for infant and early childhood mental health professionals and services. It would ensure that Rhode Island's families and children can access the resources they need to thrive. The Economic Progress Institute urges passage.

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<sup>1</sup> [Right Start Fact Sheet: Meeting Rhode Island Young Children's Mental Health Needs](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Rhode Island Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Plan, Executive Office of Health and Human Services](#)