



**Testimony Re: H-7627, Early Intervention
Bridge to Preschool
House Health & Human Services Committee
March 30, 2026
Leanne Barrett, Director of Early Childhood
Policy and Strategy**



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that help babies and young children get off to the right start.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign **strongly support Representative Tanzi's bill, H-7627**, which would require the state to develop a plan to allow children enrolled in EI who turn age 3 in May, June, July, or August and are eligible for preschool special education services to receive their IDEA services through their Early Intervention team until the start of the school year in September.

Extending EI beyond the third birthday is a best practice to promote continuity and quality of services for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. The federal government provides incentives to encourage states to adopt this practice. Several states have already implemented extension policies, and some allow children to remain in Early Intervention all the way up until they enter kindergarten.

Maintaining an effective and qualified service team is very important for children with developmental delays and disabilities to make progress. Early Intervention can be much more flexible and accommodating for family circumstances since the program follows the child across situations and settings. The federal law requires Early Intervention to be delivered in natural settings including homes, child care/early learning programs, and neighborhood settings. Early Intervention teams travel and can stick with families when they move across city/town lines if they remain in the state.

We encourage the state to also strongly consider the need to improve financing, staffing, and structure of preschool special education to enable children ages 3 -5 who were not enrolled in Early Intervention to also have access to therapies that are delivered in community-based settings through expanding the itinerant preschool special education model and considering regional delivery.

Early Intervention also needs to receive regular Medicaid rate increases which also trigger comparable rate increases by private health insurance) – including the current OHIC recommended Medicaid rate increase – **to ensure EI can provide competitive salaries to essential attract and retain qualified staff and to ensure we do not see the waiting list grow.** We need to make sure EI is adequately staffed to deliver services to all babies and young children who need it as early as possible.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.