

## **The Permanent Joint Legislative Commission on Child Care in Rhode Island**

### **2025 Retreat Summary**

Summary: This bi-annual retreat held by the Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care in Rhode Island (referred to in this report as “the Commission”) was held at Rhode Island College on October 24, 2025. Participants came together to consider the purpose and objectives of the Commission, recent accomplishments and legislative successes, engage with state and federal policy makers, and establish goals for the next two legislative sessions.

Attendees: Participants included Commission members & regular participants, childcare and early learning advocates, federal policy makers, and state elected officials.

- Elijah McLean
- Zoe Mcgrath
- Claudia Rodriguez Arrieta
- Representative Grace Diaz
- Catherine Green
- Nicole Chiello
- Julie Boutwell
- Tara Hayes
- Stephanie Manfredo
- Mary Varr
- Michael Dunican
- Lori Wagner
- Charlotte Boudreau
- Weayonnoh Nelson-Davis
- Rachel Flum
- Amy Vogel
- Senator Alana DiMario
- Leanne Barrett
- Lisa Hildebrand
- Kristy Whitcomb
- Tara Lombardi
- Senator Pamela Lauria
- Beth Caporelli
- Andrea Stein
- John Spelman
- Naiommy Baret
- Erlin Rogel
- Amy Henderson

- Sharon Fitzgerald
- Liliana Gutmann-McKenzie
- Representative Mary Ann Shallcross-Smith
- Jody SW Bernard
- Olubukola Adetola
- Lisa Nelson
- Kassandra Florez
- Jennifer Kaufman
- Khadija Lewis Khan
- Kara Foley
- Senator Lammis Vargas
- Kristen Greene

Presentations:

- Early Intervention Pre-School Special Education Transition, Tara Hayes, RIPIN
- Food Security for Children and Staff, Diane Girouard, State Policy Senior Analyst, Child Care Aware
- National, Regional, and State Child Care/Pre-K Trends, Leanne Barrett, RI Kids Count

Speakers:

- U.S. Senator Jack Reed
- U.S. Congressman Seth Magaziner
- Governor Daniel McKee
- Lt. Governor Sabina Matos
- Senate President Valarie Lawson
- House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi
- Secretary of State Gregg Amore
- General Treasurer James DiOSSa
- Senate Finance Chairman Louis DiPalma

**Part 1: Aligning & Connecting with Commission Members**

Setting Expectations & Welcome Remarks

Commission Co-Chair Senator Alana DiMario welcomed everyone and set the tone for the retreat by inviting participants to take the day to come together around the opportunity to consider the Commission's goals for both their monthly meetings, and in relation to a roadmap for the work going forward.

Senator DiMario then reviewed the goals and objectives for the retreat.

- To review the purpose and role of the Commission, and how it is driven by the people who make up the Commission;
- To elevate advocate stories to state and federal policy makers from folks who are seeking care and those who are providing care;
- To work in small groups to discuss and identify possible legislative priorities on key topics by bringing together expert and thought leader perspectives;
- To leave the retreat with a road map for legislative asks for the next two legislative sessions.

Commission Co-Chair Representative Grace Diaz gave a background on the history of the Commission, which was established in 1989, and recognized some of the longest-serving members of the Commission in attendance: Leanne Barrett, Charlotte Boudreau, Rep. Mary Ann Shallcross Smith etc. Rep. Diaz commended the support the Commission has built over time in the State Legislature and reviewed the purpose and role of the Commission.

## **Part 2: Engaging Federal Policy Makers & State Elected Leaders**

Update from Federal Policy Makers

Senator DiMario welcomed U.S. Senator Reed and U.S. Congressman Magaziner, thanked them for taking the time to attend the retreat, and prioritizing childcare and early childhood education. Next, she introduced Mary Varr and Nicole Chiello who facilitated two questions for discussion:

1. Rhode Island Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve Rhode Island's most vulnerable children statewide, but we continue to struggle to keep all our classrooms open and fully staffed. Now we have a looming shutdown to worry about which will impact the Head Start and Early Head Start program in Cranston on November 1. **How can we help you fight for Head Start funding and what can we do in Rhode Island to ensure Head Start services continue during a shutdown?**
2. Rhode Island's Child Care & Early Learning system relies heavily on federal funding with 88% of the Child Care Assistance Program spending covered by federal block grants, 100% federal funding for the food provided to child care programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food program, almost 100% federal funding for Head Start and Early Head Start, and 100% federal funding for the PDG Birth to 5 grant which has been a reliable funding source to make early childhood system improvements, including funding the launch and continuation of the Child Care WAGES program in Rhode Island which provides salary supplements to the lowest paid but most qualified child care educators statewide. **What can you tell us about the status and future of federal funding (CCDBG, TANF, Head Start, CACFP, and PDG Birth to 5)? Where are the threats the greatest? What can we do to help sustain and grow federal investments in the childcare and early learning system?**

U.S. Senator Reed and U.S. Congressman Magaziner all shared encouraging and supportive remarks, and congratulated the Commission for their success in raising awareness and advocating for child care and early education settings. They expressed a clear understanding of how important it is to have a robust child care and early education delivery system in order to support the economy and keep parents working and promised to keep fighting to bring more funding to support the industry, both in Rhode Island, and across the country.

They provided key insights on the government shutdown and steps to take to help our federally funded programs that have been affected. They both encouraged state and federal advocacy efforts are important to ensure your voice and concerns are heard. They discuss initiatives in the House and Senate that have been put forth to increase funding for Head Start spending. While the future of funding may be uncertain after November 1<sup>st</sup>, they encourage organizations to be as flexible as they can in preparation for announcements that may be forth coming when the government reopens. They believe bipartisan support will transpire to make sure all programs are funding when the shutdown concludes.

#### Panel Discussion with Rhode Island Elected Leaders

Senator DiMario thanked the Rhode Island state elected leaders in attendance and invited them to the front of the room to engage in a panel discussion. To frame the conversation, Senator DiMario invited Lisa Hildebrand and Amy Vogel to facilitate two questions for discussion:

1. How can Rhode Island's state policies better support recruitment, training, and retention within the childcare workforce to ensure quality and accessibility for families?
2. Childcare programs are continuing to struggle to attract and retain staff and provide quality services for children and families, including providing nutritious food for children. Increases in state minimum wages will be another challenge for many programs. We appreciate the 20% increase for infants under 18 months that was enacted last year. **How can we get the Child Care Assistance Program rates for all ages of children increased to meet the federal equal access benchmark, like 16 other states have?**

Similar to the discussion with federal leaders, the state delegation shared encouraging and supportive remarks, and congratulated the Commission for their success in raising awareness and advocating for child care and early education settings. Collectively, the delegation addressed its strong support for the childcare for childcare workers program as the standard for continued recruitment, training, and retention within the childcare workforce. The continuum of childcare is just as important as the continuum of healthcare and starting in the beginning to make sure children are set up for success is important. Addressing food insecurity, child care small business advocacy, and investing in our young children is a huge component of the work that has and will continue to transpire. The state delegation is aware they need to make a continued effort to remain competitive with other states in order to achieve success in Child Care Assistance

Program rates. Most importantly, they all acknowledge that child care advocacy is important, and is a continued priority for Rhode Island.

### **Part 3: State Budget & Legislative Priority Breakout Sessions**

Retreat participants were divided into small groups which then rotated through six total breakout sessions facilitated by a retreat participant whose work relates to the topic area. The goal of these sessions was to introduce current state budget and legislative priority areas and allow participants the opportunity to share their experiences and expertise and weigh in on the best approaches to budgetary or legislative strategy.

#### Breakout Session Topic: Child Care Assistance Program Improvement and Expansion

*Facilitator: Nicole Chiello, Department of Human Services*

#### Key takeaways from session conversations:

The conversations highlighted the importance of continued investment in the CCAP program, including continuing to increase the FPL as well as increasing rates to meet the federal benchmark at the one-star level. Frustrations about pieces of the systems were discussed, including: (1) providers understanding the importance of ensuring they are asking for co-payments, (2) thinking about “child care hopping” and how DHS can ensure that is not happening at the level its happening and (3) education on need hours versus authorized hours and ensuring parents and families understand that when they apply.

In general, CCAP improvements were also discussed regarding implementation of the program at the Department, including ensuring payments to FCCs are timelier and a lack of child care licensors to be able to license. We talked about streamlining communication and the understanding that providers have a lot on their plate while also understanding the more they know, the better they can run their businesses.

#### Breakout Session Topic: RI Pre-K and Head Start expansion in a mixed delivery system

*Facilitator: Mary Varr, WHSCDA and Khadija Lewis-Khan, Beautiful Beginnings*

#### Key takeaways from session conversations:

- Pros:
  - Pre K - Infant/Toddler set aside
  - Pre K - Stable funding source
  - Pre K/Headstart – Responds to community needs
  - Pre K/Headstart – Improves overall program equality
  - Helped strengthen headstart models
  - Helped stretch money
  - Children and families are getting a high quality program regardless of income
  - Flexibility – pool of resources
  - Pre-K/Headstart has better relationships with LEAs than child care programs do

- Cons:
  - Pre K – level funding when line items increasing
  - Pre K – Increases instability in child care geographic locations affects costs
  - CACFP – lottery
  - Higher # of children on IEPs in Pre-K/HS
  - Outside influences affect/make up of classrooms – immigration, new RIDE certifications with Pre-K
  - No outside of district IEPs
  - Immigration issues/enrollment
- Recommendations:
  - Increase reimbursement before expanding set aside for childcare in general
  - System for helping programs get ready to qualify for Pre-K
  - Identify where communities are that are saturated – look at open seats in child care
  - Find 2 districts that would cross lines to serve IEPs
  - More dialogue with school districts

Breakout Session Topic: Food Security for Children and Staff

*Facilitator: Leanne Barrett, RI Kids Count*

Key takeaways from session conversations:

- Increase awareness of Child and Adult Care Food Program Statewide and provide training for centers and family child care
- Try to change federal rule to eliminate or lower the requirement that for-profit child care centers have 25% or more state subsidized children in order to participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Some centers are missing only 1 or 2 children and then lose access to the CACFP which is financially devastating and means many qualified children get no help with food. ALSO, increase the number of children with a subsidy statewide would help more centers enroll them and meet this 25% benchmark so they can then access CACFP.
- Ensure new CACFP sponsor for family child care is able to succeed. Expand capacity/find a 2<sup>nd</sup> sponsor for family child care.
- Consider moving CACFP from RIDE to DHS so it can be better coordinated with the child care system and help with system building. (Also, elder care is at DHS so helps with Adult Care).
- Sustain and strengthen access to SNAP and WIC for families, especially with federal challenges.
- Build awareness and participation in [Go NAPSACC](#) program at DOH Helps child care programs prioritize, plan, and make improvements to their healthy eating and physical activity practices, policies, and environments.

Breakout Session Topic: Early Care & Education Staffing Crisis

*Facilitator: Lisa Hildebrand, RI Association for the Education of Young Children*

Key takeaways from session conversations:

- DHS marketing campaign
  - Promote pathways, Child care pilot, Highlight the value of the job
- Recruitment to HS students - Registered Apprenticeship
  - CDA programs for high school students so they can enter workforce ready
- Support continuing the DHS Child Care WAGES Program - \$1M
  - Consider a cost study of \$ attached to turnover- the investment of \$1M might be less than turnover is costing the state/programs
  - We need other funding sources- support legislation to fund it permanently
- Electoral Advocacy for the Governor race in 2026
- Reorganization of school districts
  - Why do we have so many? Can some more be regionalized in order to save money

Breakout Session Topic: Out-of-School Time programs for ages 5 and up

*Facilitator: Erlin Rogel, YMCA and Michael Dunican, RI After School Network*

Key takeaways from session conversations:

**Challenges**

- Funding constraints impacting programming, facilities/improvements, transportation, staffing/training, and turnover
- BrightStars facility-based standards and ratings creating challenges for OST in public school buildings (plus related licensing friction)
- How to provide services to “nontraditional” student populations, including students in residential facilities
- Inclusion question: how to better connect early childhood programs with the OST space/ecosystem

**Potential Solutions**

- Develop an OST workforce pipeline (RIAN): apprenticeship pathway for OST professionals, with participants earning college credits while they work
- Revisit/review BrightStars school-age care standards, especially those affecting school-based OST
- Explore delivering OST programming directly at residential facilities
- Make the ratings/appeals process easier and take a fresh look at how quality/ratings are assessed for OST contexts
- Flagged idea/question about childhood development training/credentialing pathways (“T4T, YC?” noted)

Breakout Session Topic: Services and Access for Children with Developmental Delays, Disabilities, and Mental Health Challenges

*Facilitator: Senator Alana DiMario*

Key takeaways from session conversations:

- 1) IEP indicates fully integrated class, district only offers PT/part week (Pre-K)
  - a. LEA contracts can limit ability to serve children for special education services in other contexts
  - b. ....district resources
  - c. Partnerships with private practices for services?
  - d. Challenges with physical spaces
  - e. Municipal engagement – big variety on codes and standards
- 2) Transportation from PT Pre-K to child care- won't transport across town lines
  - a. Too many transitions
- 3) Need: Re-evaluate how we invest money the top
  - i. Regionalization? RI Foundation report?
  - ii. How do we accomplish the goal of all institutions/... able to have special education centers come in?
- 4) Mismatch between what is offered and what is needed for children (per IEP)
- 5) Lack of supportive staff/workforce – lac of societal value on these professions
- 6) Safety concerns for educators – lack of workforce
- 7) Layers of need – immigration status – special education – housing...
- 8) Family child care provider – high need students
  - a. No extra funding from CCAP rate for students with disabilities (under negation with state) SEIU 1199
  - b. Centers have ability to access Kids Connect through providers with an NPI
    - i. Could we create shared positions with NPIs for multiple family home providers?
  - c. Train and support child care providers (home)?
    - i. What would be the biggest need?
    - ii. What would be curriculum?
- 9) EI is not based on district line, after 3 transportation is an issue across district lines- reciprocity?
- 10) Long gap between EI services and IEP being implemented in Pre-K
  - a. Process is there; staff is not in place in Pre-K to respond timely
- 11) Numbers of children on the spectrum/ with special needs are increasing
- 12) Use of incredible beginnings to help train with interventions for facilities that don't have access to....
- 13) Communication between school/OOST programs regarding needs- could be improved/formalized
- 14) Aftercare/summer programs at childcare- ratios...supported with funding