

CHILD, Inc.



May 6, 2026

Chair Gallo
Senate Education Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In support of S 3077, to support Head Start and RI Pre-K

Dear Chairperson and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express support for this legislation to expand access to voluntary, free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-old children, including those served through Rhode Island's state pre-kindergarten model and the federal Head Start program.

As a Head Start program serving children and families in 3 high quality Centers in Kent County RI, we recognize the importance and impact that high-quality early childhood education has—not only on school readiness, but on long-term outcomes for children, families, and communities. Head Start programs are truly among the most effective two-generational investments we can make, supporting early learning and family stability as well as essential health and nutrition supports.

Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs to be designated as categorically eligible for early childhood funding is a crucial step forward recognizing the proven effectiveness, accountability, and comprehensive nature of these programs. Head Start operates under rigorous federal standards that provides health, nutrition, and family support services deeply rooted in our communities.

This legislation emphasizes collaboration between the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services' Child Care Office, and the Head Start Collaboration Office. Keeping with aligning these systems is so important to building a coordinated, efficient early childhood infrastructure that maximizes resources and minimizes duplication, while ensuring children and families have access to the services they need.

Early childhood providers are facing increasing costs, workforce challenges and high demand. Therefore, predictable and equitable funding streams are more critical than ever. Establishing categorical eligibility will help stabilize programs and allow focus on delivering high-quality services to Rhode Island's youngest most vulnerable learners and their families.

In Kent County RI our program serves 415 children and their families; 298 Head Start/Early Head Start and 117 Pre-K and many of them for extended day childcare. For many of them, Head Start is a lifeline that connects them to critical supports and sets their children on a path toward lifelong success.

Along with other Head Start programs in RI, I urge you to support this important legislation and continue Rhode Island's commitment to investing in high-quality early childhood education and support services.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Mathiesen".

Michelle Mathiesen, LICSW
CEO & Executive Director
CHILD Inc.