



April 14, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma
Chair, Senate Committee on Finance
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H7127 – Governor’s FY 2027 Budget, FY 2026 Revised and Capital Budgets, Department of Health

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee,

My name is Debra Quinton, and I am a Registered Nurse and the Director of the First Connections Program at Family Service of Rhode Island. I am writing in support of the Department of Health’s proposed FY 2027 budget and to underscore the critical need for sustainable, dedicated funding for the state’s First Connections Program.

First Connections is a core component of Rhode Island’s early childhood public health infrastructure, serving as the State’s Child Find entity for Early Intervention and a front-line prevention strategy for infants, toddlers, and families. The program provides timely, home-based outreach to families during pregnancy and throughout the first three years of life—an evidence-informed approach that supports healthy development, strengthens caregiver capacity, and reduces risk factors associated with poor health and child welfare outcomes.

We support the Governor’s budget; however, we respectfully recommend that the Rhode Island Department of Health establish a dedicated line item to fully fund the portion of First Connections services that are not reimbursable through Medicaid. The current funding structure creates a gap that limits the program’s ability to meet demand and sustain critical prevention services.

Our multidisciplinary teams, comprised of pediatric and perinatal registered nurses, certified community health workers, and social workers, deliver targeted interventions that align with RIDOH priorities, including early identification of developmental delays, reduction of environmental health risks such as lead exposure and asthma triggers, and proactive engagement of families involved with the child welfare system. These services directly contribute to improved maternal and child health outcomes and reduce reliance on more costly, downstream interventions.

In 2025, First Connections received more than 4,000 referrals, reflecting both the scale of need and the program’s central role in the state’s coordinated system of care. Through early



engagement, education, and linkage to services, our team supports families in ways that promote safety, stability, and long-term well-being.

Sustained investment in First Connections represents a cost-effective, upstream public health strategy that advances health equity, strengthens cross-system coordination, and ensures that Rhode Island's youngest residents have a healthy start.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support the establishment of dedicated funding within the Rhode Island Department of Health budget to ensure the continuity and expansion of this essential program.

Thank you for your consideration and continued commitment to Rhode Island's children and families.

Sincerely,

Debra Quinton RN, CLC

Debra Quinton RN, CLC
FSRI First Connections Program Director