



June 2, 2026

Chair Louis DiPalma
Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In support of Senator Urso's S2369, the Early Educator Workforce Act

Dear Chair DiPalma and members of the committee,

We write in strong support of Senator Urso's bill to help address the early educator workforce staffing crisis in Rhode Island.

For over 190 years, we at Children's Friend have worked to advance the well-being and healthy development of the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rhode Island. Today, alongside our permanency and nutrition services, we provide vital early learning programs across the birth to 5 continua, including family home visiting, early intervention, Early Head Start, Head Start, child care and Pre-K. For the families with whom we work, over 90% are earning less than the federal poverty level. Our Pre-K, child care and Head Start classrooms are a lifeline that enables the parents to go to work each day and strive for a better future for their children.

For the last several years, we are seeing children with greater challenges – making the job of teaching our youngest children even harder and more important. At the same time, we are facing a significant staffing crisis. Due to years of underinvestment in these programs by the state, we struggle to hire assistants and teachers. **In fact, we have several classrooms closed because we do not have enough staff to man the classrooms.**

Senator Urso's bill would fund several initiatives to encourage current staff to remain in the field, which the system desperately needs. We especially support investments in continuing the WAGE\$ program that has a proven track record of improving retention of credentialed early educators. Wage supplements for front line teachers are a worthwhile investment for Rhode Island to make in our children.

We urge you to pass this bill – the staffing crisis is not showing signs of lessening and our children deserve to have access to the services we want to be able to provide.

Board of Directors

Carmen A. Mirabal
Chairwoman

Kimberly I. McCarthy, Esq.
Vice Chairman

Kyle O. Mason
Treasurer

Benjamin J. Mellino
Assistant Treasurer

Bahjat Y. Shariff
Secretary

Kamilah A'Vant

Rosa E. De Castillo

Ana Echevarria De Saquic

Mark Griffin

Maureen Gurchigian

Leonard L. Lopes, Esq.

Ivette C. Luna

Susan Carney Lynch, Esq.

Michael Mayer

Aneri A. Patel

David Caprio
President and
Chief Executive Officer



Thank you for your time and review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to support the children who are the future of our State. If you have further questions or need any additional information, please contact me at dcaprio@cfsri.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Caprio".

David Caprio
President and CEO