

June 2, 2026

Dear Members of the Senate Financing Committee,

I am writing in support of an act relating to education – Rhode Island Early Educator Workforce, which would enable Rhode Island to continue and expand the Child Care WAGE\$ program.

As the director of an early childhood education program, I have seen firsthand the positive impact WAGE\$ supplements have on educator retention and program stability. My program employs educators who currently receive WAGE\$ supplements, and these additional funds help dedicated early educators remain in the field despite the financial challenges many face.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment in my program has been inconsistent, while operating expenses such as rent, utilities, food, and insurance have increased dramatically. Due to these rising costs and lower enrollment numbers, I am unfortunately unable to pay my staff more than minimum wage, despite the important work they do every day. Some of my employees have worked with me for over seventeen years. They are experienced, dedicated early childhood educators who deserve far greater compensation for the responsibility and care they provide to children and families.

My program serves many children from low-income families and children experiencing difficult home situations. Approximately 94% of the children enrolled in my program receive CCAP assistance, meaning their tuition is paid by the state. I believe every child deserves access to safe, nurturing, high-quality early education, and I do not turn families away based on their financial situation.

However, the reimbursement rates for CCAP are significantly lower than the tuition rates charged by many other child care centers in the area. Some programs are unable or unwilling to accept infants and toddlers receiving CCAP because the reimbursement rates do not cover the true cost of care. While I remain committed to serving these families, the low reimbursement rates make it extremely difficult to increase staff wages or remain financially stable.

Programs like Child Care WAGE\$ Rhode Island are essential because they help recognize and support the dedicated educators who continue serving children and families despite these financial challenges. Without support for the workforce, many experienced educators may leave the field entirely, creating even greater shortages in early childhood education.

Early childhood educators are the foundation of high-quality care and learning for young children. Retaining experienced and qualified staff is one of the greatest challenges facing child care programs today. The WAGE\$ program recognizes educators for their education, commitment, and continued service, while helping programs like mine maintain consistency for children and families.

When educators stay in their positions longer, children benefit from stable relationships, families experience continuity of care, and programs are better able to maintain quality standards. The supplements also encourage educators to continue their professional development and remain committed to the early childhood profession.

Continued funding and expansion of Child Care WAGE\$ Rhode Island is an important investment in the early childhood workforce and in the children and families we serve across our state.

Thank you for your consideration.

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