

Chair Abney  
House Finance Committee  
RI State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

May 1, 2024

Re: Testimony regarding Representative Giraldo's RI Home Visiting Act Bill, H 7899

Dear Chair Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Alyssa Carvalho I live in Coventry and Rep Nardone is my Representative. I am a nurse in the First Connections program working with Children's Friend. I have worked with the First Connections program for 4 years and over that time I have been in hundreds of family's homes to help them with their newborn baby.

I urge you to support Rep Giraldo's bill, H7899, that will make sure that we can continue to serve children in the First Connections Program by keeping the current rates, not the reduced rates as proposed in the Governor's FY25 budget.

Being a nurse for First Connections program is not a regular nursing job. It is a job I love, but it is not as simple as weighing babies in at a pediatrician visit. Instead, we are going out into the community and into family's homes. While we are there, we check the baby, assess the mother's physical and mental health, check the safety of the home (check smoke detector etc.), help with basic needs like food, and diapers and sleep sacks. We help educate about safe sleep and refer moms and children to other services such as Early Intervention and long-term home visiting support (Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, and Parents as Teachers). We also provide information regarding rental/utility assistance, dental and primary care services for the family, education and job training, as well as breastfeeding support and childcare options.

Imagine being a 16-year-old adolescent mom having a baby for the first time. The baby was born prematurely due to intrauterine growth restriction. The father of your baby is not involved and does not want a relationship with you or the baby. Your support system is very limited. Your primary support is your single mom who is struggling financially and does not speak the English language. Due to the language barrier, her ability to help you advocate for yourself and the baby is impossible. In your childhood DCYF was involved due to parental neglect. As a result, you were not able to experience a healthy parent child relationship. You are now the primary caretaker of this fragile newborn with no previous knowledge or experience with infant care. You are scared and anxious. You are unsure of how to bathe your baby, feed your baby, or even hold your baby correctly. You've never changed a diaper or taken a baby's temperature. For any mom, not just a 16-year-old mom, this would be overwhelming.

Enter First Connections. We are a families first link to provide education, support and connection to resources available in the community. We provide services in the home which helps everyone access the program even if they don't have consistent access to transportation. In the case of this adolescent mom, First Connections assisted with basic needs such as diapers, wipes, a Pack N' Play and sleep sacs to promote safe sleep, Infant clothing, bottles, Stop and Shop gift card, and a stroller that was assembled by First Connections staff. Also, First Connections staff were able to develop an open and trusting relationship with this teenage mother. We are hopeful that this relationship is the foundation for her to be able to trust and connect with other providers/professionals that are available to her. Warm hand-offs with other home visiting programs help to ensure that the family is engaged with long-term parenting support. These connections helped this mom to be more confident as a parent. Our program provided these crucial connections that will give mom and baby the best opportunity for a healthy and safe start.

First Connections really is a lifesaving program. Please pass H7899 to ensure that we can continue to do this important work for some of Rhode Island's youngest and most at-risk children and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.