



Children's FRIEND

Making a difference...
one child at a time.



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childrensfriendri.org



April 23, 2024

Chairman DiPalma
Senate Finance Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony in support of S2344

Dear Chair DiPalma and members of the committee,

We write in strong support of Senator DiMario's bill S 2344 which would make the Child Care for Child Care Educators program permanent and improve the program. We believe this will help reduce the significant early educator workforce staffing crisis in Rhode Island.

For 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.

As Rhode Island rebuilds from the COVID-19 pandemic, 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.

Senator DiMario's bill will make a very successful program – the Child Care for Child Care Educators Pilot – permanent, remove the family income limit, and make frontline staff in Early Intervention programs eligible. At Children's Friend we have had several staff who have been able to take advantage of the program – one of whom, Yeisha Pereira, submitted testimony to you on how this program kept her from quitting AND allowed her to get a promotion to lead Head Start teacher. We also had several staff who applied for the program but were earning over the income limit and so were denied. This is the kind of innovative policy solution we need to hire and retain qualified staff.



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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.

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 & CEO