

April 3, 2024



Children's FRIEND

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

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childrensfriendri.org



Chairwoman Tanzi
House Finance Committee
Subcommittee on Human Services
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony regarding the Governor's FY2025 Budget vis a vis DHS

Dear Chairwoman Tanzi and members of the committee,

Our testimony today concerns the Governor's FY2025 proposed budget related to the Department of Human Services. We were very disappointed that the Governor's budget did not recommend any increased investments in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) or Head Start. **We strongly encourage you to make significant investments in both of these programs to shore up the early learning system here 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, home visiting and nutrition services, we provide high quality care to hundreds of families at our 13 licensed early childhood centers across, Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls, which have earned 3, 4, or 5 stars on the BrightStars Quality Rating System.

We also serve over 600 3- and 4-year-old children in our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. For the families with whom we work, most of whom are earning less than the federal poverty level, child care and Head Start are a lifeline that enables them to go to work each day and strive for a better future for their children.

While we appreciate the investments you made last year in the these programs, including two (2) pilot programs that are set to expire and are also not included in the Governor's budget, we urge you to do more. We continue to face a significant staffing crisis and find ourselves unable to keep all our classrooms open due to our inability to adequately staff those classrooms.

We urge you to invest in reimbursement rates, invest state dollars in Head Start seats, and help us fund increased teacher salaries so we can open all our classrooms and meet our families' needs. Legislation will be before you later this session by Representatives Diaz, Donovan and McNamara with solid proposals that we urge you to support.



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

The state's investment in child care has dropped significantly in the last 18 years both for child care and Head Start. In FY2005, General Revenue spending in child care was \$56.2 million compared to FY2023's \$8.7 million; a reduction of \$47.5million. Now, a time with increased need by our children who have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, is not the time to have such reduced funding.

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