

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

May 1, 2024

Re: Testimony regarding Representative Cotter's Early Intervention bill, H7334

Dear Chair Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Alicia Moran. I live in Greenville and Representative Rea is my Representative. I am a clinical supervisor in the Early Intervention (EI) program at Children's Friend and I have my Infant Family Specialist Endorsement from the RI Association for Infant Mental Health. In my role, I oversee 5 EI staff members including educators, service coordinators and therapists, as well as, carry my own small caseload of clients. I have been in this program 5 years, over which time I have seen the need for our services grow significantly.

EI is a program that provides in-home services and supports to babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Last year, the EI program at Children's Friend provided services to 600 children under the age of 3. This year, we are already up to over 300 children.

I urge you to pass Representative Cotter's bill, H7334, that will increase the current EI Medicaid rates to ensure this program can keep staff and hire additional staff, which we need to serve the increased number of families after COVID.

While we have been able to hire and maintain most of our staff, there are still waitlists for new children. If the rates are increased, we could hire more therapists and interpreters or bilingual therapists to help meet the needs of our growing Spanish-language clients.

One story that shows an increased need for providers is that of a client who was seen recently by one of our program educators. This provider had started work with a family two months before the child would turn three, and no longer be eligible for the EI program, due to the statewide wait for services. This child had multiple needs and the provider worked quickly to add occupational and speech therapy to his plan to support his development. Both the team and family noticed progress in the time they had before the EI team facilitated the transition from EI to school-based services. While there is no doubt about the incredible work the team and family accomplished in that short time, we still think about the potential progress and connections we could have built on if they had more time in the program.

I would also note that in my position, I'm able to see the valuable role that First Connections plays in referring families to EI. Without First Connections, we would lose the connection to many of these families who need our services to ensure their children get the services they need to thrive.

Please ensure that the EI rates are sufficient so we can continue to support these children and their families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.