

2024 Budget and Legislative Priorities

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1.

Save First Connections Home Visiting

(H7899 Giraldo / S2360 Valverde)

Make the long-needed (23 years!) rate increase permanent for the Rhode Island First Connections home visiting program to prevent substantial rate cuts scheduled for July 1.

2.

End Waiting Lists for Early Intervention

(H7334 Cotter / S2359 Valverde, Governor's FY25 budget)

- Provide a 25% Medicaid rate increase to fully staff Early Intervention programs to end waiting lists and serve all children in need.
- Establish an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for rates.
- Add Early Intervention staff to the Child Care for Child Care Educators program (and remove the household income limit). See this also under (Solve the Early Educator Staffing Crisis below).

3.

Sustain and Strengthen Early Education and Child Care:

Solve the Early Educator Staffing Crisis (H7123 Diaz / S2344 DiMario):

Expand and continue the Child Care for Child Care Educators program to include Early Intervention staff. Remove the household income limit by providing eligibility for early educators to the Child Care Assistance Program as a protected population with no copayments. This program will end in July 2024 unless continued in statute.

Pass the Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act (H7251 Donovan / S2038 Cano) to:

- Invest \$2.5 million to continue the Child Care WAGE\$ national model program to provide substantial wage supplements for early educators with CDAs, associate's, and bachelor's degrees. This program will end in summer 2024 without new funding.
- Invest \$5 million to continue retention bonuses @ \$3,000/year for some early educators to prevent loss of staff/closure of more classrooms and programs.

Streamline Access to the Child Care Assistance Program (H7122 Diaz / S2459 DiMario):

Remove the outdated child support enforcement requirement in statute.

Child Care is Essential (H7124 Diaz/Cano):

- Invest approximately \$12 million to raise family income eligibility to the federal standard for CCAP, helping about half of the families in Rhode Island with babies and young children.
- Invest \$6 million to provide a 50% rate increase for infants under 18 months in the RI Child Care Assistance Program to stabilize and expand access to quality care for the age group in greatest need.
- Increase provider rates for all ages of children in the RI Child Care Assistance Program to meet or exceed federal standards.

Expand RI Pre-K Equitably in Birth – 5 Context (H7497 McNamara/Gallo, Governor's FY25 budget):

- As Pre-K expands, ensure there is adequate investment to:
- Provide compensation parity for all teachers of publicly funded preschool classrooms (RI Pre-K and Head Start) equal to public Kindergarten teachers with similar qualifications and experience. Right now, there is a \$25,000 gap in pay.
- Sustain and expand state investments in Head Start and Early Head Start as part of the state's plan to achieve universal access to preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- Establish and fund a 30% infant/toddler spending benchmark in statute as part of RI Pre-K expansion, so that for every \$10 million of new funding invested in RI Pre-K expansion there will be at least \$3 million of new funding invested to sustain and expand access to high-quality infant and toddler child care and early learning.
- Allow and support family child care programs to participate in delivering RI Pre-K. Remove state requirements restricting enrollment based on child residence for RI Pre-K programs in community-based settings to promote continuity and family choice.

End Waiting Lists for Early Intervention (H7334 Cotter / S2359 Valverde, Governor's FY25 budget):

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- Establish an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for rates.
- Add Early Intervention staff to the Child Care for Child Care Educators program (and remove the household income limit). See this also under "Solve the Early Educator Staffing Crisis above).

4.

RI Works Cash Assistance Program

Improve the RI Works Cash Assistance Program (H7686 Handy / S2337 Murray):

- Update the cash assistance benefit to ensure children do not live in deep poverty (below 50% FPL)
- Adopt an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA).