



May 5, 2026

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

Re: In support of Senator Vargas' S2667, Child Care is Essential

Dear Chairman DiPalma and members of the committee,

We are writing in strong support of Senator Vargas' Child Care is Essential Act, which would improve children's access to high quality childcare so caregivers can go to work, and children are supported so they can thrive.

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For over 190 years, Children's Friend has 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. For the families with whom we work, most of whom are earning less than the federal poverty level (FPL), child care is a lifeline that enables the parents to go to work each day and strive for a better future for their children.

Children's Friend continues to face a significant staffing crisis and we find ourselves unable to keep all our classrooms open due to our inability to adequately staff those classrooms. This is not about need or family interest of families – we have waitlists. In fact, we currently have over 100 children on a wait list for infant and toddler slots, and are delayed in opening a new location because we are struggling to hire teachers. This wait list number under-represents the need, because many parents don't bother to put their name on the list after they hear how long the wait is to get into a program.

This Act would help address this staffing crisis by increasing Child Care Assistance (CCAP) reimbursement rates so we can open our classrooms and meet our families' needs. The act also sets CCAP rates for infants 3 0% higher than toddler rates to cover part of the funding gap associated with the staffing requirements needed to keep infants healthy and safe (4 infants for 1 teacher) versus toddlers (6 toddlers for 1 teacher). Infant care is our most expensive



program and hardest to staff. Our child care wait list for children under age two (2) is half of our total child care wait list. Parents are struggling to find infant care and this bonus rate would help us hire and retain teachers who can staff more infant classrooms.

Child Care IS essential and without it, parents simply cannot go to work and improve their circumstances. We should make it easier to come obtain care. Instead, despite growing recognition that child care is necessary for workers and the economy to function, Rhode Island's investment in child care has dropped significantly in the last 20 years, and the numbers of enrolled children have also fallen dramatically. As we continue to learn the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the state should make a significant investment in the CCAP program that helps our youngest children start on the right path.

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](mailto:dcaprio@cfsri.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Caprio".

David Caprio  
President and CEO