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

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childrenfriendri.org



March 20, 2024

Chairwoman Cano
Senate Education Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Cano and members of the Senate Education Committee,

RE: In support of Senator Cano's bill S 2038, the Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act

We write in strong support of the Chairwoman's bill to help address the 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 Cano's bill would fund two initiatives to encourage current staff to remain in the field, which the system desperately needs. We especially support investments in continuing the WAGES program that has a proven track record of improving retention of credentialed early educators. Wage supplements for front line teachers are a worthwhile investment for Rhode Island to make in our children.

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.



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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 tochoa@cfsri.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Caprio".

David Caprio
President and CEO