April 3, 2023

Chairwoman Cano
Senate Education Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony regarding Senator Cano's Child Care is Essential, S 2847

Dear Chairwoman Cano and members of the committee,

We are writing in strong support of Senator Cano's 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.

For 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.

We thank you for the investments you made last year in the Child Care Assistance (CCAP) program, including the Child Care for Child Care Staff pilot, which has helped us retain staff. But there is more to do. 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 – especially for our infant/toddler classrooms. These classrooms are closed because we do not have enough staff.

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. It would also provide a bonus rate for infant care, which is our most expensive program and hardest to staff. Our child care waitlist for children under the age of 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.

This Act would also help more parents access the CCAP program by eliminating the cumbersome requirement that parents must participate in the

Child Support Enforcement program to access CCAP and increasing the income eligibility limit. 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.

Sincerely,

David Caprio
President and CEO