



May 20, 2025

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

Re: Support of the Family Home Visiting bill S677

Dear Chairman DiPalma and members of the committee,

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Chief Executive Officer

My name is Elizabeth Garganese, and I'm a RN working in the First Connections Program at Children's Friend. I'm here in strong support of Senator Valverde's Family Home Visiting Act, S677.

At Children's Friend we are proud to run two home visiting programs: First Connections and Healthy Families America. In our First Connections program we served over 500 families last year. It is imperative that we sustain these programs, so we can continue to provide essential and lifesaving supports, connection to the community and necessary resources.

Why First Connections is so important: First Connections is a short-term home visiting program with the goal of providing prompt intervention and support. However, in many cases high-risk and vulnerable families need continued support for various reasons.

First Connections staff are trained to quickly assess families in crisis and provide connection to available resources in the community. We are often referred to families with high risk factors or those facing extremely difficult circumstances. A few examples include facing eviction/homelessness due to situations out of their control, difficulty connecting to financial resources while out of work to recover from childbirth, trouble finding a pediatrician for a child needing vaccines or other important healthcare treatment, mental health crisis, and food insecurity. First Connections is meant to provide that immediate assistance to connect with vital resources.

Providing nursing care for those who have just given birth and have risk factors is lifesaving. We have the knowledge necessary to assess and screen for potentially dangerous complications such increased blood pressures in postpartum period and postpartum depression and/or anxiety. We also provide lifesaving education on topics like safe sleep practices.

First Connections is part of a continuum of support: In First Connections, we assess, provide short-term services, and refer to long-term home visiting programs

when necessary. That is why it is so important for the families we serve to continue to have access to not only our program, but the long-term home visiting programs we refer our most high-risk clients, such as Healthy Families America.

Nurse Family Partnership was a long-term home visiting program in Rhode Island that has closed due to funding issues. Its closure has increased the high-risk families and prenatal clients referred to First Connections and put more demand on remaining programs with the same limited resources and staff. The families are still in need of support regardless of funding. Rhode Island must figure out how to better finance these programs because the fee for service Medicaid model is extremely difficult to sustain.

The fee-for-service model makes it challenging to provide the care our clients need. We work tirelessly to coordinate care with other programs including WIC, DCYF, Early Intervention, Healthy Families America, and Early Head Start. It is extremely difficult to fit in emails and phone calls to other programs to place referrals, give updates on family status, report necessary information to others working with our families, ensure connection with programs in the community, and more between each home visit. Case management will always be a crucial piece of our job to provide the best care for the families we serve, but we are not given adequate time or resources.

The fee-for-service model does not provide necessary time or resources for important and required steps to prepare for visiting vulnerable families. Our home visits typically last an 1-1.5hrs, however the work required before and after visits is not accounted for. I spend a significant amount of time preparing for visits by looking up the necessary information, consulting with my coworker on high-risk cases, preparing resources requested in referrals, and more

The fee-for-service model is also impacting staff retention and overall morale. It is particularly challenging in regard to First Connections because of the population served. We visit families with children who are 0-3 years old. However, most of our referrals are for families that recently had a newborn, which comes with difficulties and a lot of unknown. We run into last minute cancellations very often for reasons like sleepless nights with a newborn and unplanned pediatrician visits, which are no fault to the new parents. The fee-for-service model places intense stress on staff because of the need for billing. It is near impossible to fill these last-minute cancellations, and staff are left to scramble for billable time or be below the desirable productivity. If we were able to complete the other important aspects of our job including preparing for upcoming visits and care coordination, I believe both staff recruitment/retention and family outcomes would greatly improve.

For all these reasons, I urge you to pass Senator Valverde's Family Home Visiting bill. The families we work with deserve to continue to have access to these truly lifesaving programs.

Thank you for your review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to support the children who are the future of the state.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Garganese, RN  
First Connections Nurse