

2024 Budget and Legislative Priorities



1.

Save First Connections Newborn Home Visiting:



First Connections is Rhode Island's frontline home visiting service for families with newborns statewide. Children's Friend is one of four non-profit agencies that provide this program designed to identify babies' and families' needs as early as possible and connect them with services to address those needs. Children's Friend served almost 400 children in 2023.

Rates for First Connections have not been permanently increased in 22 years. Without a permanent increase, we will no longer be able to provide this critical service. **We urge the state to make the increased rates permanent, effective July 1, 2024.**

2.

Invest in and make improvements to the Early Intervention (EI) Program:



Rhode Island's EI program provides special education services to infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities. EI is the front door to the state's public education system and the foundation of the special education system. Children's Friend served 600 children in 2023.

Rates for EI are below what is needed to sustain the program and, coupled with a staffing crisis, the result is children have long wait times for services. **We urge the state to fully fund Early Intervention as recommended by the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner.**

3.

Sustain and Strengthen Early Education and Child Care:



Children's Friend provides an array of early education and early child care options for families including Early Head Start, Head Start, Child Care, and Pre-K. We served over 1,900 children in 2023 at one of our 13 licensed early childhood centers. We have a waitlist for these programs, primarily due to our inability to hire enough staff.

We urge the state to invest in child care reimbursement rates, the Head Start program, and strategies to invest in our early education workforce.

For more information about our priorities or to read testimony visit
www.cfsri.org/advocacy