



Children's FRIEND

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



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April 11, 2024

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

Re: Testimony in support for S2360, the RI Family Home Visiting Act

Dear Chairman, DiPalma and members of the committee,

We write in strong support of Senator Valverde's bill S2360 to fully fund the First Connections home visiting program, include an annual cola for First Connections rates and ensuring the state has a plan to invest state dollars in other home visiting program so that we can maximize federal funds and expand those programs.

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, nutrition services, child care, Head Start and Pre-K programs, we are one of four Rhode Island agencies that run a First Connections program. We served 400 individuals in our First Connections program last year. We are also proud to run other vitally important home visiting programs including Early Head Start, Nurse Family Partnership and Healthy Families America.

First Connections, a newborn home visiting program funded through the Department of Health, hasn't had a permanent rate increase in 22 years. For the last two years, the General Assembly used ARPA funds to provide a temporary rate increase which allowed us to continue to provide the services to families this year. However, without a permanent increase, our ability to provide this service will be in jeopardy. The program costs much more than the current rates and is not sustainable without at least maintaining the current rates.

First Connections is truly the first responder program for Rhode Island. The program connects new moms with a nurse or social worker right after she returns home from the hospital and ensures both mom and baby are stable and set up for success. This important program helps support mom and new baby to promote self-sufficiency and prevent child abuse and neglect. Many of the families with whom we work are earning less than the federal poverty level. This program helps them start their parenting on the right foot and ensures that both mother and child are able to access health, mental health and early learning services to make certain that the



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child is able to grow and thrive. We urge you to invest in the current reimbursement rates proposed in Senator Valverde's bill so we can continue to meet our families' needs.

We also fully support the part of this bill that will require the development of a plan to sustain and expand voluntary family home visiting services, including meeting the new state funding matching requirements for the federal Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting funds to draw down new federal funds so that high-quality programs are offered to all families who could benefit. These programs often help the same families as in First Connections but are longer-term and more comprehensive supports. Rhode Island should make the small (\$242,000) investment to bring in \$762,000 in federal funds for these evidence based programs.

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,

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

David Caprio
President and CEO