



May 5, 2026

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

Re: Testimony in support of Senator Valverde's Extension Option for Early Intervention: Bridge to Preschool (S2834)

Dear Chair DiPalma and members of the Committee:

We write in support of S2834, an act which would give eligible families the opportunity to extend Early Intervention (EI) services until the September after a child's third birthday, to reduce gaps in services and promote smooth transitions into school-based special education services.

Under current law, Rhode Island's EI program ends on a child's third birthday, at which point school districts become responsible for providing special education services to eligible children. This is challenging because schools typically work on school year calendars, and school-based services are not always available immediately when a child turns three, especially if the child has a spring or summer birthday. **We often see gaps in services for children transitioning from EI to school-based special education, and these gaps could be avoided if families had the option to extend EI until the start of the next school year.**

For over 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, nutrition services, child care, Head Start and Pre-K programs, **we serve 770 children in our Early Intervention (EI) program.** While EI doesn't have income limits, at Children's Friend **over 90% of the families we work with are living in poverty.** We know that addressing developmental delays early is of paramount importance to ensuring these children are able to succeed later in life.

We also appreciate that S2834 takes an incremental approach to avoid overloading a fragile provider system too quickly. While we are working hard to serve all the children who need our services and are proud to report that we have eliminated our wait list and are serving all our families within the 45-day federal time limit, we continue to see increased need after COVID and we are still struggling to have enough staff to keep up with the demand.

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The proposal includes a planning period, followed by a ramp-up over two additional years. This roll-out strategy should give the State, providers, school districts, and families the time to develop the capacity and new systems necessary to support this new population of EI recipients after their third birthdays.

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@efsri.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Caprio". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being more prominent than the last name "Caprio".

David Caprio
President and CEO