

Testimony to the House Committee on Finance, Wednesday, March 4, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is David Caprio, and I am the President and CEO of Children's Friend.

I am here today to enthusiastically support the Housing and Infrastructure Bond in Article 5 of the Governor's Proposed 2021 Budget.

The \$15,000,000 in funding that will be devoted to physical improvements to and the development of licensed early childhood education facilities is urgently needed and a step in the right direction.

As a provider of early childhood services in Rhode Island, Children's Friend uses a variety of spaces to help provide high-quality classrooms to our kids. We own some of our sites and we lease several sites. We partner with several public housing authorities, we partner with school districts, and we partner with several other community-based organizations for early childhood classroom space.

Despite the above and despite being actively engaged in securing new space, Children's Friend does not currently have adequate space to fully meet the needs of the community for high-quality early childhood classrooms.

Currently, approximately 50% of the 915 children in our Head Start program attend Head Start classes which operate for four (4) hours a day and 160 days per year. These classes share a physical classroom with one class operating on a morning schedule from 8am until noon, and one class operating on an afternoon schedule from 1pm until 5pm.

Children's Friend has the desire and the operational funding to move more of our half-day classes to operate on a full school day and full school year model.

The full school day and full school year model has tremendous benefits for the children in the class. However, with the longer school day – two (2) class sessions cannot share the same classroom space. Additional classrooms are needed.

Since we do not have any available classrooms, we cannot move additional Head Start classes to the full school day full school year model.

This bond supports both the development of new high-quality early learning classrooms as well as renovations and improvements to improve the quality of existing classrooms.

Based on previous projects that Children's Friend has worked on, I believe this \$15 million investment will actually spur millions more in investment as organizations secure grants and donations to assist with the capital projects.

Supporting the Housing and Infrastructure Bond, which will help support families with affordable housing and with increased access to high-quality learning facilities, is not just the right thing to do, it is something that will provide positive returns to the State for years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I urge you to support the Housing and Infrastructure Bond.