



Children's FRIEND

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

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childrensfriendri.org



Date: _____

Dear Representative/Senator: _____

My name is _____. I work for Children's Friend as _____. Children's Friend is Rhode Island's first child-serving nonprofit agency founded in 1834 in Providence as a home for abandoned and abused children. We accomplish our mission by ensuring that our services are family-centered, seamless, and outcome-driven. Children's Friend also takes a leadership role in advocating on behalf of Rhode Island's youngest and most vulnerable children.

Today, I write to elevate the current workforce crisis that is affecting health and human service organizations and limiting our ability to meet the needs of our community. I urge you to return to session and vote in support of the allocation of the RI American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, as submitted by Governor McKee, to invest in early education, child welfare, Early Intervention and child health services.

Our state faces serious childcare, health, and safety challenges due to COVID. Early care and education programs have experienced reduced enrollments due to parents' reluctance to send their children due to health concerns. Programs have experienced increased costs to comply with new health and safety mandates. Furthermore, childcare programs may have to close due to the exodus of its workforce.

Contracted programs with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) provide critical care and services to the most vulnerable children and families in the state. As a result of the pandemic, these providers have experienced significant staffing shortages at a crisis level, severely compromising the availability and quality of care provided to vulnerable children and families.

As of October 2021, four of the nine Early Intervention providers are closed to new referrals due to a staffing crisis due to the pandemic. Without immediate funding, more providers will close, and more children needing Early Intervention will not have access to services. Governor McKee has proposed \$5.5 million to stabilize the EI network by providing funding to make up for staffing losses and allow for a quick recovery of service to families with young children with developmental needs.

Reduced revenues, increased costs, and challenges to hire and retain educators and other early care professionals have left many services at risk of collapsing. Employers are constantly challenged with making very difficult decisions about allocating their limited resources to address staff retention because they operate on razor-thin profit margins that leave little room to establish and support sustainable strategies to improve compensation for professionals in our field.

Again, I urge you to invest the ARPA resources that Rhode Island has available, as other states have, to stabilize our struggling early care sector, working families, and local economy. We have a great opportunity now to make a real impact.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Respectfully,

Signature: _____