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one child at a time.

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March 2, 2022

Chairman Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of Child Care Provisions in Articles 1 & 13, H-7177

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the Committee,

Children's Friend supports the proposals related to Child Care in Articles 1 and 13 of the Governor's FY23 proposed Budget, which include critical short-term supports to mitigate the current early education workforce crisis while also permanently increasing rates and making more families eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). We also strongly support H-7177, The Child Care is Essential Act, which would further invest in child care for the long-term so that all Rhode Island children will have access to the high-quality care they need and deserve.

For 188 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, home visiting, and nutrition services, we provide high quality child care to hundreds of families at our 13 licensed early childhood centers across Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls, which have earned 3, 4, or 5 stars on the BrightStars Quality Rating System. For the families with whom we work, most of whom are living under the federal poverty level (FPL), child care is a lifeline that enables them to go to work each day and strive for a better future for their children.

As Rhode Island rebuilds from the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that child care will be an essential building block of our economic recovery. The Child Care Assistance Program enables access to child care for the families who have been hit hardest by the pandemic – families whom we risk leaving behind as we rebuild. But this critical access is endangered on two counts: first, by the early educator crisis in Rhode Island, and second, by the narrow current CCAP eligibility requirements which exclude many families in need. As Rhode Islanders go back to work, many are struggling to make ends meet, but may not qualify for CCAP. We know that in many cases, children in this situation often end up in less dynamic educational settings that leave them less prepared for kindergarten. Given the educational inequities exacerbated by the pandemic, we cannot afford to turn away children who face disadvantages from high quality learning experiences.

The Governor's proposed budget address both the workforce crisis and the crisis of access. First: as providers receive reimbursement rates that fall far short of what we spend to provide quality care, we are struggling to recruit and retain talented staff. This is why we support Article 1 of the Governor's FY23 Budget proposal, which would support



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one more year of wage supplements/retention bonuses for early educators and includes other workforce supports. However, short-term supplements – though critical – will not address the systemic challenges facing child care in Rhode Island with respect to both workforce and family access. The permanent rate increases and permanent increase in family income limit for CCAP in Article 13 of the proposed Budget will ensure stability of care for families while allowing us to serve families we've previously had to turn away – families whose incomes are often only slightly above the income eligibility limit.

The Child Care is Essential Act builds on the strengths of the Governor's budget. The Act permanently increases rates for CCAP for all age groups and settings to meet or exceed the federal equal access standard, permanently increases the family income limits to allow more families to qualify, makes college student eligibility permanent, among other provisions. Critically, the Act limits copayments to 7% of a family's income; we know that many of our families struggle to make co-payments up to double that percentage of their incomes. This was the case before COVID-19; the impacts of the pandemic have exacerbated this challenge for some families.

Our recovery as a state depends on your support for these measures. At a minimum, the state must make the changes as provided in FY23 Budget Articles 1 and 13 as regards to child care. We also urge you to pass H-7177, The Child Care is Essential Act, as soon as possible.

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 any 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