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



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March 3, 2022

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

RE: Testimony in Support of ARPA Proposals, Article 1, Section 16 - Early Intervention Recovery; provisions in Article 12 regarding Cover All Kids & postpartum coverage

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the Committee,

Children's Friend **supports the proposals related to Early Intervention (EI) in Article 1, Section 16 of the Governor's FY23 proposed Budget (H7123)**, which includes an additional \$5.5 million funding to address the statewide staffing crisis and eliminates the waiting list infants and toddlers with developmental delays now face. We request for this funding to be tied to provider rates. We also **support the provisions in Article 12 to Cover All Kids and postpartum Medicaid coverage**, which would extend Medicaid coverage to all children, regardless of immigration status, and which would also extend Medicaid coverage to 12 months postpartum, regardless of immigration status.

Children's Friend is proud to work to promote the well-being and healthy development of Rhode Island's youngest and most vulnerable children through our home visiting, early education, nutrition, and permanency services. No program is closer to our mission than Early Intervention, through which we provide services and supports to babies and young children (0-3) with developmental delays and disabilities. These services include speech therapy, physical therapy, or other types of services. Our program – which disproportionately serves low income families in the urban core – is a lifeline for hundreds of families each year. Early Intervention can help children and families overcome challenges and change the course of their lives.

Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for Early Intervention has never been greater – but Rhode Island's Early Intervention system is in crisis. While the use of ARPA funds to stem the statewide staffing crisis and eliminate the EI waiting list is critical, it is imperative that the State recognize that the current EI crisis has been precipitated by decades of disinvestment from this critical program: reimbursement rates have not been increased for 20 years. Rates that do not cover the costs of quality care mean that providers are unable to attract and retain talented staff. This workforce crisis has resulted in infants and toddlers with developmental delays throughout Rhode Island waiting to receive critical care.

This means that right now in Rhode Island, a young infant showing signs of a speech delay or a delay in walking may be unable to access Early Intervention services to help them overcome the delay. They instead will be put on a state waitlist for weeks or months until a spot opens up for them. A preponderance of research tells us intervening early in life, while the brain is first developing, is the best way to make a lasting positive impact on a child. A delay in accessing needed services on a young child, even for just a few months, may have a lifetime of negative impacts. By delaying

services, we are losing our best opportunity to help children in Rhode Island with developmental delays and disabilities.

Rhode Island kids can't wait for these life-changing services. The problems in the Early Intervention System have been caused by many years of inadequate resources. We urge your support for the Governor's proposals regarding EI in Article 1 – but we implore you to look to long-term rate increases for this program as well.

Deeply related to this issue is the question of Medicaid coverage for all children and postpartum parents, regardless of documentation status. Without Medicaid coverage, many children and families in our communities are left without access to adequate healthcare – including Early Intervention services. The COVID-19 pandemic has only underlined that access to adequate healthcare for all is an investment in our shared future and boosts public health outcomes that have wide-reaching impacts.

The well-being of the most vulnerable young children in the state depends on your support for these measures. At a minimum, the state must support the provisions in Article 1, Section 16 regarding Early Intervention, tying the funding to rate rather than programmed based, and the provisions in Article 12 regarding Cover All Kids & postpartum coverage. But inaction on rate increases for Early Intervention is no longer an option if we are to have a functioning system of care for children with developmental disabilities and delays.

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". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" and last name "Caprio" clearly legible.

David Caprio

President and CEO