



Children's FRIEND

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



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March 22, 2022

Chairman Ryan Pearson
Senate Finance Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of provisions in Article 12 regarding Cover All Kids & postpartum coverage & H7484 and S2187; ARPA Proposals, Article 1, Section 16 - Early Intervention Recovery

Dear Chairman Pearson and members of the Committee,

Children's Friend **supports the provisions in Article 12, Section 7 to Cover All Kids, as well as H7484 and S2187.** These would extend Medicaid coverage to all children, regardless of immigration status, and would also extend Medicaid coverage to 12 months postpartum, regardless of immigration status. We also urge you to pursue initiatives to sustain critical programs like Early Intervention and First Connections, including **Article 1, Section 16 (Early Intervention Recovery) and the Early Intervention & First Connections Act (Giraldo, H7628, Valverde, S2546).**

Children's Friend is proud to promote the well-being and healthy development of Rhode Island's youngest and most vulnerable children. A majority of the kids we serve have RItE Care, and some of our programs – like Early Intervention, through which we provide services and supports to babies and young children (0-3) with developmental delays and disabilities, and First Connections, which identifies and connects high-risk babies to needed services – bill through Medicaid. Medicaid is a lifeline for hundreds of families each year, and programs like Early Intervention and First Connections can help children and families overcome challenges and change the course of their lives.

Rhode Island previously offered access to RItE Care coverage to all children, regardless of immigration status, until 2007. **H7484 and S2187 restore coverage for this extremely vulnerable group of Rhode Islanders.** In 2019, 98.1% of kids in Rhode Island had health insurance. Of the remaining 4,000 children who were uninsured, 3,000 were income eligible and not enrolled in RItE Care. In order to give families adequate health care – like the comprehensive services both Early Intervention and First Connections offer – we must promote any initiative that closes this gap. Health insurance coverage for us all reduces the likelihood that children will need preventative services later in life, and mitigates high costs in emergency room visits. 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 12, section 7, H-7484, and S-2187 regarding Cover All Kids & postpartum coverage. **But lack of RItE Care coverage is not the only threat to healthcare access for Rhode Island's most vulnerable kids.** Currently, kids with developmental delays and disabilities may be unable to access the care they need due to severe underfunding of critical programs.

Inaction on rate increases for Early Intervention and First Connections is no longer an option if we are to have a functioning system of healthcare for children. That is why we support the **Early Intervention & First Connections Act (Giraldo H7628, Valverde, S2546)**, which would require the state to permanently and significantly increase Medicaid rates for the Early Intervention program and for the First Connections program. As a critical stopgap measure, we also support **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 eliminate the waiting list infants and toddlers with developmental delays now face.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to supports 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, appearing to read "David Caprio", with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Caprio

President and CEO