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one child at a time.



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March 29, 2022

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

RE: Testimony in support of Governor's proposed budget regarding DHS child care & ARPA, Article 1, Section 16

Dear Chairman Pearson and members of the committee,

Our testimony today is in support of the **Governor's FY2023 proposed budget regarding DHS child care and ARPA, Article 1, Section 16**, which would support retention bonuses for early educators, funding to expand Rhode Island's T.E.A.C.H. early childhood workforce development program, and funding for an early educator registry which will help us understand more about the needs of the workforce and staffing turnover challenges.

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. Yet critical child care access is endangered by the early educator crisis in Rhode Island. The Governor's proposed budget addresses 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 additional wage supplements/retention bonuses for early educators and includes other workforce supports. However, short-term supplements – however 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 in 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.

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,


David Caprio

President and CEO