



Children's FRIEND

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



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CONTACT

153 Summer Street
Providence, RI 02903

401.276.4300.p

401.331.3285.f

401.729.5899.tdd

childrenfriendri.org



March 29, 2022

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

RE: Testimony Regarding Governor's FY 2023 Budget – Department of Health

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the Committee,

Children's Friend testifies today both in support of what is contained in the Governor's proposed budget for FY 2023 for the Department of Health, and to highlight a critical component that is missing from the proposed budget and needs to be added.

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 child welfare work, early education classrooms, and nutrition services, we provide Family Visiting services to many vulnerable children and their families.

In partnership with the Department of Health we offer First Connections, Nurse Family Partnership, Healthy Families America, and WIC services to our community.

I am testifying today in regards to the First Connections program, which is one of the Family Visiting programs under the Department of Health. Children's Friend, along with other community based providers across the State, are contracted to provide First Connections services.

First Connections provides nurse and social work visits to the homes of high risk newborns as they are discharged from the birthing hospital. Our nurses ensure the home environment is safe for the new infant, provide education to parents caring for their newborn, ensure the child has the basic necessities such as food, diapers, and a safe place to sleep, help ensure proper pediatric visits and immunizations are received, and make connections to longer term supports for the family as needed.

First Connections is a critical safety net, supporting the health and well-being of some of our most vulnerable children when they are discharged from the Hospital.

The reimbursement rates for First Connections have not been increased in 22 years. Despite the critical importance of this program and the need to retain registered nurses and clinical social workers, we are disappointed that the Governor's budget continues to significantly underfund this program.

Thankfully, a bill has been introduced in the House to help address this situation. It is H-7628 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Maternal and Child Health Services for Children with Special Health Care Needs.



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This bill would raise the reimbursement rates for First Connections by October 1, 2022. The estimated cost to the State in General Revenue is only \$520,000.

I urge you to consider and support House Bill 7628 as part of the review and consideration of the FY 2023 Department of Health Budget.

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