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one child at a time.



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Chair Sandra Cano
Senate Education Committee
RI State House
82 Smith St
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of Child Care is Essential Act, S-2681

Dear Chair Cano and members of the Committee,

Children's Friend **strongly supports S-2681, The Child Care is Essential Act**, which would allow access to high quality care so caregivers can go to work and their children can be supported to thrive. We view this act as a necessary extension of the support for child care providers in the long term, so that programs like ours can sustainably provide quality care to Rhode Island's lowest-income families.

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.

The Act begins to address a dominating crisis of the early childhood education field –the crisis of access to families. By limiting co-payments to 7% of a family's income, families will be more likely to be able to cover the costs of center-based child care. Currently, the average cost for child care for one infant in Rhode Island is \$13,780, which would require a family to make \$196,857 annually to consider child care to be "affordable." With this Act, a family making \$52,000 will be able to spend up to \$3,640 annually for child care.

The use of the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is vital for families who cannot afford child care out of pocket. The Act critically expands income eligibility limits for CCAP to 266% of the federal poverty level and raises the "exit" income limit to 400% of the federal poverty level. This expansion allows for more children to receive care that will develop and sharpen their social-emotional skills and prepare them for school.

For providers, the name of this act truly says it all: **Child Care is Essential**. As Rhode Islanders continue to go back to work, we must have state laws that recognize the community importance of child care providers and early childhood educators. Our pandemic recovery as a state depends on your support for these measures. We urge you to pass S-2681, 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,

David Caprio

President and CEO