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



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March 30, 2022

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

RE: Testimony in support of Governor's FY 2023, FY 2022 Revised and Capital Budgets, Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Department of Human Services

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the committee,

Children's Friend supports the proposals related to Early Intervention (EI) and Child Care in the Governor's FY 2023, FY 2022 Revised and Capital Budgets (EOHHS & DHS), which would work to mitigate the statewide staffing crisis in both service areas. At the same time, we urge a significant rate increase for Early Intervention, which will support the long-term sustainability of the program and prevent it from falling back into crisis after one-time funding expires.

Through Early Intervention, we at Children's Friend provide services and supports to babies and young children (0-3) with developmental delays and disabilities. We also 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. Our programs – which disproportionately serves low income families in the urban core – are a lifeline for hundreds of families each year. Early Intervention and child care 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.

Both Early Intervention and child care are critical pieces of a social service ecosystem that adequately support the most vulnerable children and families in our state. We are proud to support the Governor's proposed budgets in these areas – and we encourage further action, which is necessary to shore up these services for the long term.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony. If you have any further questions or need any additional information, please contact me at dcaprio@cfsri.org.

Sincerely,

David Caprio
President and CEO