

Chairman Abney  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

April 20, 2023

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

RE: In support of Representative Giraldo H 5983

My name is Elizabeth Czerwein. I live in Scituate and am a constituent of Representative Robert Quattrocchi. I am here today in support of Representative Giraldo's bill to add Early Intervention professionals to the list of professions that qualify for the Wavemaker Fellowship program.

I have been in the field for over 20 years and for the past 15 years I have worked as a physical therapist for Children's Friend in their Early Intervention (EI) program. EI is a program that provides services and supports to babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Last year, the EI program at Children's Friend provided services to 474 children under the age of 3. This year, we are already up to 350!

While I love working with these children, I must admit that I feel it's a challenge to remain in this profession. The current EI system in Rhode Island has not provided sufficient funding for providers to adequately staff their programs. As a result, I juggle a very large, almost unmanageable, caseload.

In addition, the wages have in no way kept up with the high demand of needed therapists; not to mention I am still paying off a substantial amount of student loans that I have been paying on for over 20 years. I am able to access some loan forgiveness through the RI Student Loan Assistance program, which Children's Friend does contribute to, but it is a tiny drop in the bucket.

Adding EI to the list of professions that can access a Wavemaker tax credit is an important – although not in my opinion big enough -- step in helping get more qualified therapists to enter the EI profession and stay. Loan forgiveness, instead of a tax credit, would be a better option in the long run, but this is a good start.

I would also mention that this should be part of a larger attempt to better fund the EI system in Rhode Island. I know you will be hearing bills later focused on increasing rates paid to providers. There is a critical need to both obtain and retain highly qualified professionals and we are failing our children and families if we cannot accomplish this. It is my hope that both bills get passed.

Please pass Representative Giraldo's bill so that we can get and keep – including me! -- needed professionals in the Early intervention program. Our most vulnerable children depend on it.

Thank you,  
Elizabeth Czerwein  
61 Knight Hill Road, Scituate, Rhode Island 02815