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



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childrensfriendri.org



April 4, 2023

Chairman Scott Slater
Subcommittee on Education
House Finance Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony regarding the Governor's FY2024 Budget vis a vis RIDE

Dear Chairman Slater and members of the committee,

Our testimony today concerns the Governor's FY2024 proposed budget related to the Rhode Island Department of Education. **Children's Friend supports the Governor's proposed budget which includes \$7 million in general revenue to sustain the RI Pre-K program.**

For 189 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, childcare, Head Start, and nutrition services, we provide high-quality Pre-K education to over 170 four-year-olds in our state-funded Pre-K classrooms. Many of the families with whom we work are earning less than the federal poverty level. Our Pre-K, childcare, and Head Start classrooms are a lifeline that enables parents to go to work each day and strive for a better future for their children.

The \$7 million in general revenue funding will prevent the closure of 800 RI Pre-K seats for the 2023-2024 school year after federal preschool expansion funds have expired. We also support the \$1.3 million in state general revenue to help support the addition of new classrooms in 2024.

We enthusiastically support protecting and expanding Pre-K, but also strongly encourage the state to ensure that this expansion is part of a larger effort to shore up the entire early learning system – especially as it relates to staff salaries. We cannot fund one part of this system while ignoring the others. At Children's Friend, we pride ourselves in ensuring seamless quality programming for children in all of our 4-year-old classrooms, whether they are in childcare, Head Start, or Pre-K. However, the funding is not equitable across these programs. The Governor's RIDE budget funding is a step, but more comprehensive funding for the entire early learning system is needed.

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 further questions or need additional information, please contact me at dcaprio@cfsri.org.

Sincerely,

David Caprio
President and CEO