

April 20, 2023



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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

childrensfriendri.org



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

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

RE: In support of Representative Giraldo H 5983

We write in strong support of Representative Giraldo's bill to add Early Intervention professionals to the list of professions that qualify for the Wavemaker Fellowship program.

For 189 years, Children's Friend has worked to advance the well-being and healthy development of the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rhode Island. Today, alongside our permanency, nutrition services, childcare, Head Start, and Pre-k programs, we also provide Early Intervention (EI) services to almost 500 children a year.

Early Intervention is an EOHHS funded program that ensures that any child under age three (3) with development delays can access services and support. While this program does not have income limits, at Children's Friend over 90% of the families we work with are living in poverty.

Last year, Children's Friend provided EI services to 474 children; this year, we are already up to 350 by the end of March.

As you may have heard, the statewide EI waitlist last year was up to 800 families. While those numbers are lower now, we are still struggling to serve all the kids who come to us because of an extreme staffing crisis. We need increased reimbursement rates to help us continue to run the program and increase pay so we can retain and attract the professional staff the program requires. In addition, we also need proposals to get folks into the pipeline of qualified job applicants for the EI professionals who we rely on to serve our clients – nurses, speech language pathologists (SLPs), physical therapists (PTs), and occupational therapists (OTs). Adding these Early Intervention specialists to the list of professions that can access a Wavemaker Fellowship is an important piece in the larger puzzle of helping solve the current crisis the EI system in Rhode Island is facing.

We urge you to invest in our youngest, most at-risk children by taking this step to incentivize PTs, OTs, and SLPs to go into, and stay in, the EI field so we can continue to meet our families' needs.

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