

April 27, 2023



Children's FRIEND

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



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Chairman DiPalma
Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman DiPalma and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

RE: In support of Senator Gallo's Bill S523

We write in strong support of Senator Gallo'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 Rhode Island's youngest and most vulnerable children. Today, alongside our permanency, nutrition services, child care, Head Start, and Pre-K programs, we provide Early Intervention (EI) services to almost 500 children annually.

Early Intervention is an EOHHS-funded program that ensures that any child under age three (3) with developmental 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 live 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 was up to 800 families last year. While those numbers are lower now, we still struggle 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 to 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 whom 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