



February 6, 2024

Chairman Joseph McNamara
House Education Committee
RI State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, Ri 02903

Re: Testimony in support of Representative Carson's bill H5164

Dear Chairman McNamara and members of the committee,

We write in support of Representative Carson's bill to create an IDEA task force to develop a financing and staffing plan for a coherent system of educational and developmental services for babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities from birth to kindergarten.

For over 190 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, nutrition services, child care, Head Start and Pre-K programs, we serve 600 children in our Early Intervention (EI) program.

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

While we are working hard to serve all the children who need our services, we are seeing increased need after COVID and we are still struggling to have enough staff to keep up with the demand. As of today, we have 20 families who have been referred to us who are waiting for services.

We need adequate 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 solutions to get professionals into the pipeline of qualified job applicants for the EI

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professionals who we rely on to serve our clients – nurses, speech language pathologists (SLPs), physical therapists (PTs) and occupational therapists (OTs).

We think having a statewide task force that is looking at the overall IDEA system, including what other states do to support providers and ensure more family's needs are met, makes a lot of sense and we thank Representative Carson for introducing this bill.

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 any additional information, please contact me at dcaprio@cfsri.org.

Sincerely,



David Caprio
President and CEO