

To the Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Ashley Zechello. I am a member of the Women's Fund of RI Policy and Advocacy Committee. **I am writing to express my strong support Representative Grace Diaz's, H-7123, which would make the successful Childcare for Childcare Educators program permanent to support the dedicated staff who serve Rhode Island children and their families.** These employees play a critical role in supporting Rhode Island's children and their families; However, it is essential to question: how is Rhode Island supporting them?

It is imperative that we take action to reduce waitlists so that all children in need of services can receive the assistance they require. However, staffing shortages present a significant barrier to achieving this goal. **The pilot program has demonstrated its effectiveness in retaining and attracting employees to these vital services.**

Staffing challenges are paramount in ensuring the success of this program. By providing consistent support to the staff who tirelessly serve Rhode Island families, we can create a more stable and nurturing environment for children in need.

The success of similar initiatives in states like Kentucky serves as a testament to the potential benefits of adopting such programs. Rhode Island would undoubtedly benefit from following suit.

The statistics speak volumes. As of February 2023, there were 623 infants and toddlers on the waiting list, underscoring the urgent need for action. **By making this program permanent, we support the employees who support Rhode Island's children and their parents.**

It is disheartening to note that 9 out of 10 families in Rhode Island struggle to afford childcare. **By prioritizing the well-being of our staff and the families they serve, we can work towards addressing this disparity and creating a more equitable society for all.**

In conclusion, I urge you to consider the immense benefits of making the one-year pilot program a permanent fixture in our efforts to support Rhode Island children and families. **The issue of staffing shortages should not fall onto the children of Rhode Island.**

Thank you for your attention on this matter.

Sincerely,
Ashley Zechello