



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

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Office of the Director

Kimberly Merolla-Brito

May 9, 2024

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 7123 – An Act Relating to Human Services – The Rhode Island Works Program

Dear Chair Abney:

I am writing to share information concerning H 7123, which seeks to remove the current sunset of the Child Care for Child Care Staff Pilot Program, while adding an additional cohort of eligible beneficiaries to the program. As the committee undertakes its consideration of this proposed legislation, the following information is submitted with the intention of providing additional information and context.

The pilot program administered through the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) was passed in the Governor's Enacted FY2024 Budget, extending eligibility of child care to child care educators and staff with family incomes up to 300% of the applicable federal poverty level and waived co-payments.

DHS is actively evaluating the pilot's progress and awaiting a program report due November 1 of this year to determine final enrollment figures, and effects on beneficiaries. It is important to note that because of federal rules, a 12-month mandate for eligibility has already increased the cost of the program above the initial \$4 million allocation. This is creating a need to split funding costs over two fiscal years, rather than the initial SFY 24. Of note, the child care pilot has to date facilitated the enrollment of 373 children across licensed centers and family child care programs.

Intended to provide an additional means of support to the child care sector, the pilot is succeeding as an incentive to help maintain qualified staff at DHS-licensed child care centers and with family child care providers.

As mentioned, proposed legislation would add another cohort of individuals, specifically those who provide early intervention services. This proposed additional group operates outside of the licensure requirements of DHS, unlike the original cohort, presenting additional challenges related to verifying eligibility and establishing new workflows with other agencies, not previously considered.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. Should you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to our agency.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Merolla Brito

Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director

RI Department of Human Service

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance
The Honorable Grace Diaz
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy