



**American
Heart
Association.**

May 9, 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

SUBJECT: Support for House Bill 7123 and House Bill 7124

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

The American Heart Association would like to voice support for House Bills 7123 and 7124 by Rep. Diaz, and we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony. To reach their full potential, all children, no matter where they live or their family's income, should have access to high-quality early care and education programs.

In the first few years of life, a child's brain develops rapidly, building an important foundation for future learning, behavior, and health.ⁱ According to an issue brief from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, children who participate in early childhood programs are more likely to grow up as healthy adults and have higher earnings.ⁱⁱ In addition, according to a study in Science, participation in high-quality early childhood programs can lead to significantly lower risks for cardiovascular and metabolic disease later in life.ⁱⁱⁱ Research by James Heckman reported high-quality birth-to-five programs can lead to better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment.^{iv}

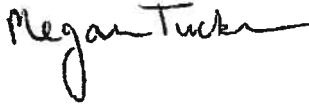
House Bill 7123 – Child Care for Child Care Educators: House Bill 7123 would make the successful Child Care for Child Care Educators Program permanent, remove the family income limit to help more staff, and make frontline staff in Early Intervention programs eligible. This is a powerful strategy to increase recruitment and retention and address the staffing crisis in child care and early education programs. It will also provide more children with access to high-quality early learning environments.

House Bill 7124 – The Child Care is Essential Act: Rhode Island has cut \$46 million in state funding from the Child Care Assistance Program and currently helps half as many children as we did 20 years ago. We have the lowest family income cut off for child care assistance in the Northeast. This bill would expand family eligibility to the federal benchmark of 85% of State Median Income (\$89,482 for a family of 3 in 2024) and allow families to retain the subsidy up to 100% of State Median Income (\$105,273 for a family of 3 in 2024). The legislation would also provide a 50% rate increase for infants in the Child Care Assistance Program to help programs increase wages, reopen classrooms, and reduce waiting lists.

The American Heart Association urges the committee to invest in Rhode Island's children, families, and early educators. Please support House Bills 7123 and 7124.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Tucker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Megan Tucker
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megan.tucker@heart.org

ⁱ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. May 2016.

http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/From_Best_Practices_to_Breakthrough_Impacts-4.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Early Childhood Experiences Shape Health and Well-Being Throughout Life (Issue Brief). August 2014. http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2014/rwjf414926

ⁱⁱⁱ Campbell FA, Conti G, Heckman J, et al. Early Childhood Investments Substantially Boost Adult Health. *Science*, 2014; 343(6178): 1478-1485, 10.1126/science.1248429.

^{iv} Heckman JJ; The Heckman Equation Project. Research Summary: The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. 2016. https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf.