



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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Testimony Re: H-7896 – Department of Human Services Child Care Licensing Inspectors

House Finance Committee

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports passage of Representative Casimiro's bill, H-7896, which would require the RI Department of Human Services to have enough child care licensing inspectors to [meet national caseload standards for child care licensing inspection staff](#).

Child care licensing inspection is the foundation of quality and is necessary to ensure basic health and safety standards are met, including adequate staffing in child care, early learning, and out-of-school time programs.

We would ask that as this requirement is added, that you add language into state law that requires DHS to conduct at least two unannounced inspections of licensed child care programs per year with the expectations that inspections will increase, as needed, to ensure protections are in place and satisfactory compliance is obtained. This is the current practice in Rhode Island for child care centers. At least two unannounced inspections per year are recommended by the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) with additional visits recommended, especially when needed to ensure compliance.

We'd also recommend that language be added into statute along with the caseload per inspector requirement that requires DHS child care licensing inspectors meet the definition of highly qualified and trained licensing staff and that DHS has practices and supports are in place to ensure licensing activities are carried out in a professional and consistent manner as recommended by NARA.

We also ask that statutory language be added to require that DHS investigate any complaints or reports of child care programs that are operating illegally or are out of compliance with any critical health and safety standards immediately or within 5 days, to include program-reported or staff-reported incidents with classrooms out of compliance with staff: child ratios. This is also recommended by NARA.

All substantiated complaints and licensing actions taken to address critical health and safety non-compliance and violations (e.g., temporarily shutting down classrooms due to inadequate staffing) should be documented and shared with parents and the public along with the findings from routine licensing inspections as is recommended by NARA and required under federal law.

State child care licensing regulations and monitoring and enforcement policies help provide a baseline of protection for the health and safety of

children enrolled in child care, early learning programs, and out-of-school time programs and provides an essential service for working parents.

Effective, robust child care licensing prevents harm to children. It mitigates the risk of injury or death from fire, hazards, and inadequate staff oversight and training. It helps to prevent children's developmental delays and behavioral challenges that can result from the lack of healthy relationships with caregivers or developmentally inappropriate expectations or activities. It can also help to reduce staff turnover in child care programs when programs are monitored to ensure staff: child ratios and other critical health and safety standards are met by child care program owners and operators.

Rhode Island DHS reports that from 2020 to 2022, there were 11 incidents of serious injury to a child and 28 incidents of child abuse and/or neglect in a licensed child care program. Thankfully, there were no reported deaths of children in a licensed child care program.

States manage the child care licensing process through the application and enforcement of regulations and **adequate staffing is needed to ensure basic standards are met in licensed programs.**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks Representative Casimiro for sponsoring this bill and we urge passage to strengthen our health and safety infrastructure for child care, early learning, and out-of-school time programs.