



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: H-7900 – Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub

House Finance Committee
May 15, 2024
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

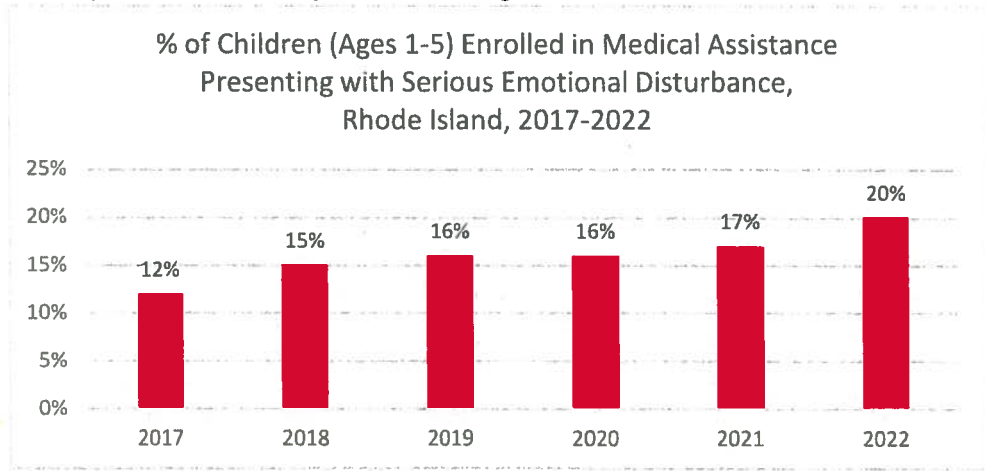


Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that will help families with young children.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support Representative Fogarty's Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub bill, H-7900, which would create programming to grow the capacity of the early childhood mental health workforce.

In 2023, the Rhode Island Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Taskforce issued [a plan with 10 recommendations to address and improve the mental health needs of Rhode Island's youngest children](#). The plan recommends that the state build therapeutic capacity by developing a Rhode Island Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub to train and support professionals to use appropriate and culturally-responsive tools and therapies to better screen, evaluate, and treat children under age six with mental health challenges. **Rhode Island has a very limited capacity of practitioners in evidence-based therapies for young children.**

The number of young children enrolled in Medicaid presenting with Serious Emotional Disturbance has grown from 12% in 2017 to 20% in 2022. Many young children, both with Medicaid and commercial insurance, are experiencing significant mental health challenges that interfere with their development, relationships, and learning.



In the early years, babies and young children develop the capacity to form close and secure relationships, experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions, and explore the environment and learn.

[A national report tracks state policies that help young children access key infant and early childhood mental health \(IECMH\) services.](#) Rhode Island's Medicaid and commercial insurance providers already pay for mental health services for young children, but **Rhode Island does not have many of the recommended policies and systems that are needed to develop and support therapists to work with very young children and their families.**

For example, there are currently only three licensed clinician (and none listed as "active") in Rhode Island trained to use the [ChildParent Psychotherapy](#) (CPP) model, an evidence-based parent/caregiver & child dyadic therapy treatment for infants and young children under age six. There are 21 states that require or recommend the use of specific evidence-based dyadic therapy models for children under age six.

The 2024 Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub bill will:

Fund a 5-year pilot program to:

- 1) Train and support infant and early childhood mental health professionals to adopt and implement evidence-based practices.
- 2) Maintain a registry of infant and early childhood mental health professionals and their qualifications and help connect families to services.
- 3) Monitor the availability of services, new national recommendations, and advancements in interventions/therapies.
- 4) Make recommendations annually to Medicaid and behavioral health systems to address gaps.

Mental health is an important part of physical health, and the continuum of care should focus on prevention and promotion of mental health and wellness strategies as well as the treatment of mental health diagnoses at all ages, even for our youngest children. Growing the capacity of the workforce for early childhood mental health will build the foundation needed to improve the mental health of Rhode Island's youngest children. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.