



**To: House Committee on Finance**

**From: RI Association for Infant Mental Health (RIAIMH), Sheila Grant Orphanides, Program Development Coordinator, Susan Dickstein, Executive Director**

**Date: May 14, 2024**

**Subject: H-7900 (Fogarty) to fund a five-year pilot Mental Health Professional Hub to train and support infant and early childhood mental health professionals to adopt and implement evidence-based practices.**

RIAIMH is a non-profit workforce development organization with a mission to educate, elevate, and engage with a diverse workforce, informed by infant and early childhood mental health principles, so that all infants, young children, and families in RI thrive.

Infants and young children can and do suffer mental health challenges--supporting mental health in the early years prevents worsening of symptoms and reduces need for more costly interventions required when challenges go unaddressed. The mental health needs of infants and young children are often overlooked despite decades of research showing critical brain architecture forms in the early years and serves as the foundation for lifelong health and mental health. The mental health of infants and young children depends on consistent and nurturing relationships with parents/caregivers in the context of family, community, and cultural strengths. Early social and economic adversity/trauma, including systemic racial inequity, contributes to early mental health challenges within a system that is not well prepared to address them.

Infant/early childhood mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention is difficult multi-generational work that requires providers to have specialized knowledge, training, and core skills. The current social and economic climate has intensified family stress and mental health challenges, and has directly impacted levels of workforce stress, burnout, and turnover. There is a shortage in RI of cross-sector providers within the infant/early childhood mental health workforce who have the specialized knowledge, skill, training, and support to effectively identify/intervene and address challenges that arise. There are gaps in expertise in evidence-based dyadic therapy and developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive assessment and diagnosis. The proposed professional HUB will offer access to competency-based and culturally meaningful promotion, prevention, and intervention opportunities, so professionals are better positioned to support positive mental health outcomes for infants, young children, and families. When providers are supported, babies and families thrive.

RIAIMH thus affirms the benefits of the creation of an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub to support providers who work with or on behalf of infants, young children, and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My colleagues and I are thankful for your continued leadership on issues related to infant/early childhood mental health and family wellbeing.