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Subject: Support for House Bill No. 7900

Dear Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of SEIU 1199NE, representing over 5,000 healthcare, childcare, and service workers across Rhode Island, I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill No. 7900. This critical legislation addresses the growing mental health needs of Rhode Island's youngest children.

H-7900 aims to address significant gaps in the availability and quality of mental health services for young children. The bill proposes a 5-year pilot program to train and support mental health professionals in evidence-based practices, maintain a registry of qualified professionals, monitor service availability, and provide annual recommendations to Medicaid and behavioral health systems. This comprehensive approach ensures that Rhode Island's youngest residents receive the mental health support they need to thrive.

Imagine a situation where a young child in a childcare setting begins to show signs of severe anxiety and disruptive behavior. Currently, the childcare worker may struggle to manage these behaviors due to a lack of specialized support. If H-7900 were passed, this worker could quickly connect the child's family with trained mental health professionals through the proposed registry. These professionals, equipped with evidence-based practices, would provide timely interventions, greatly improving the child's emotional well-being and the overall classroom environment.

Additionally, many of our childcare workers encounter young children with emotional disturbances that disrupt their ability to learn and socialize effectively. Currently, these children often have to wait months for appointments with adequately trained therapists. By establishing

a Rhode Island Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub, H-7900 would expedite access to necessary therapies, allowing our childcare workers to create a more supportive and stable environment for all children in their care.

We urge the committee to pass H-7900 to address the mental health needs of our youngest children and support the professionals who care for them. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Moore