



# Children's FRIEND

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one child at a time.

  
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April 30, 2024

Chairman Abney  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In support of Representative McNamara's H7497 Pre-K Expansion

Dear Chair Abney and members of the committee,

We write in strong support of Representative McNamara's bill H7497 that would ensure that Pre-K expansion is done with attention to the funding needed to provide compensation parity for teachers and to the investments needed to sustain and expand access to other essential parts of the early care and education system, particularly infant and toddler care,

For 190 years, we at Children's Friend have worked to advance the well-being and healthy development of the youngest and most vulnerable children in Rhode Island. Today, alongside our permanency, home visiting, child care, Head Start and nutrition services, we provide high quality pre-k education to over 171 four-year-olds in our state funded Pre-K classrooms. For the families with whom we work, most of whom are earning less than the federal poverty level, our Pre-k, child care and Head Start classrooms are a lifeline that enables them to go to work each day and strive for a better future for their children.

We wholeheartedly support expanding Pre-K, but also strongly encourage the state to ensure that this expansion be part of a larger effort to shore up the entire early learning system - especially as it relates to staff salaries. **Representative McNamara's bill would be the thoughtful expansion we need; it will require pay parity for Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers and ensure funding also goes to support infant and toddler programs.**

This proposal is following Rhode Island's own state Pre-K Plan from December 2022 which stated: "a potential unintended consequence of expanding pre-kindergarten programming can be a reduction in infant/toddler capacity. RI already has a crisis in access and affordability for infant/toddler care and causing greater disruption in this space will lead to significant economic disruption and make it difficult for young parents to participate in the workforce." The report recommends between at 10% and 30% Infant/Toddler Set Aside to ensure continued support for infant/toddler capacity as the state expands Pre-K.



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Taking staff from infant/toddler programs would make a bad situation even worse. We have over 100 children on a wait list for infant and toddler slots currently. And that number under-represents the need, because many parents don't bother to put their name on the list after they hear how long the wait is to get into a program.

Please pass Representative McNamara's bill and invest in BOTH Pre-K expansion and programs for infants and toddlers such as Early Head Start and infant/toddler child care.

Thank you for your time and review of this testimony, and for your continued efforts to support the children who are the future of our State. If you have further questions or need any additional information, please contact me at [dcaprio@cfsri.org](mailto:dcaprio@cfsri.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Caprio".

David Caprio  
President & CEO