



Chair Teresa Tanzi  
Human Services Subcommittee  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House

Re: Governor's FY 2026 Budget - Department of Health

Dear Chair Tanzi and members of the Committee,

I am writing in regard to the Department of Health's FY26 Budget and the important need to adequately fund the State's home visiting programs. I request that you provide and include adequate funding for the First Connections Program to continue the critical work that they do for RI infants, children and families.

My name is Debra Quinton and I am an RN and FSRI's First Connections Program Director at Family Service of Rhode Island. Our program is the state's emergency response, short-term program to assist and connect all families to resources who have children under 3 years old. We are also the child find entity for Early Intervention Services. In 2024, First Connections Teams received over 4,000 referrals.

First Connections Teams are made up of Pediatric Registered Nurses, Certified Community Health Workers, and Social Workers. Examples of our interventions include: finding children who have not returned to the pediatrician, assisting children's families with resources to prevent lead exposure or address asthma risks, conducting developmental screenings on every child under 3 years old who has touched the DCYF system, and connecting parents to substance use treatment, behavioral health services, financial supports, education and job resources. Additionally, we educate all parents on home safety and safe sleep practices.

This program is in danger of closing if a continued source of funding is not dedicated to it. Without First Connections, it is probable that we will see a significant increase in the number of children involved in child welfare, injuries and even deaths.

I urge you to vote to add the \$355,374 into RIDOH budget to ensure early childhood services are sustained.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Debra Quinton RN, CLC  
FSRI First Connections Director