



To: House Finance Committee

From: Denise Shavers, Director of Community Engagement (former Director for the Parents as Teachers Program), Connecting for Children and Families

Date: Date of hearing is Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Re: The Rhode Island Department of Health's budget for FY26 will be heard in the House Finance Committee

Opposed, Bill Number, H5076, Lack of state match funding to draw down for federal home visiting funds.

Connecting for children & Families serves Woonsocket and Northern Rhode Island by providing family-centered programs and educational opportunities that empower children, families, and individuals to thrive and succeed. Yearly, we serve over 7,000 children and families across four main program areas: Early Learning, Out of School Time, Workforce Development, and Family Support.

Opposing Testimony on H-5076 (DOH Budget)

The CCF PAT program was the only Parents as Teachers (PAT) program in Northern Rhode Island, supporting 100 contracted slots funded by the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) under the Family Visiting Department. However, due to changes in funding, RIDOH required all Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) programs to transition to a fee-for-service model, which **drastically reduced** the level of funding available.

As part of this shift, RIDOH required us to bill Medicaid for most of our home visits and imposed **budget restrictions on how we could access and use MIECHV dollars** to support our program. These strict stipulations made it nearly impossible to draw down the MIECHV funds we desperately needed. Unfortunately, the Medicaid reimbursement rate was **insufficient to cover the program's operational costs**, placing a significant financial burden on provider organizations.

As a result, sustaining the program became impossible, forcing us to make the heartbreaking decision to discontinue these critical services.

The closure of our PAT program left a devastating gap in services that once:

- Increased parent knowledge of early childhood development and promoted positive parenting practices.
- Provided early detection of developmental delays and ensured timely connections to essential services.
- Improved the health and well-being of parents, children, and families.



- Helped prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Enhanced children's school readiness and long-term success.
- Strengthened family economic well-being.
- Fostered stronger community connections and capacity.

We are deeply concerned about the vulnerable families who have lost access to these essential supports. Many of the families we served relied heavily on the program for guidance, connection, and stability. It is heartbreaking and unacceptable that these families, who remain in need, have been left without this lifeline.

We oppose the Department of Health's proposed budget because it fails to allocate the necessary general revenue to meet the state match requirement. Without this funding, Rhode Island will be unable to draw down the full amount of available federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds. These critical resources are essential to sustaining and expanding access to proven programs that support the health and well-being of vulnerable families across the state.

Opposing Testimony on H-5076 (DOH Budget)

A Call to Protect and Strengthen Rhode Island's Vulnerable Families

We strongly oppose the Department of Health's proposed budget because it neglects to allocate the critical **\$356,000 in state match funding** needed to unlock an additional **\$1.1 million in federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds**—resulting in a devastating total loss of **\$1.4 million** in funding. This funding is not just a line item in a budget—it is a lifeline for vulnerable families across Rhode Island who depend on evidence-based home visiting programs for essential support.

Since 2021, participation in these proven programs has **dropped by 37%**, from 1,317 families to just 827, due to ongoing financial and staffing challenges. In 2024 alone, **three home visiting programs were forced to close**, and without immediate action, Rhode Island's only **Nurse-Family Partnership program** will shut its doors by the end of March 2025.

As the only **Parents as Teachers (PAT) program in Northern Rhode Island**, Connecting for Children and Families (CCF) witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of inadequate funding when we were forced to close our PAT program on September 30, 2024.

The failure to fully fund the state match for MIECHV not only puts these essential services at risk but also represents a **missed opportunity to leverage federal dollars that strengthen family outcomes and public health**. Evidence-based home visiting programs are proven to generate a return on investment of **\$1.75 to \$5.70** for every dollar spent by reducing costs associated with child protection, special education, and the criminal justice system.



Rhode Island was one of **only three states and territories in 2024** that failed to meet the full state match for MIECHV funding. This failure sends a harmful message to the families we serve—families who trust these programs to provide the support, resources, and stability they need. We cannot afford to let this happen again.

We urge the Senate and the House to prioritize the well-being of Rhode Island's most vulnerable families by fully funding the state match for MIECHV. Without this funding, we risk losing more programs, leaving families without the critical services they rely on, and turning away millions of federal dollars that could be used to improve family outcomes across our state.

The time to act is now. Rhode Island families deserve better.

Denise Shavers, M.Ed.

Director of Community Engagement (Former Director of the Parents as Teachers Program)

Connecting for Children & Families