



Rhode Island Department of Human Services
25 Howard Avenue, Building 57
Cranston, RI 02920
Phone: (401) 462-2121 Fax: (401) 462-6594

April 9, 2024

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan
Chair, House Committee on Health and Human Services
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 7934 – Joint Resolution Supporting Continued Focus and Actions for Improved Coordination Between Agencies Responsible for Early Childhood and Early Learning Programs

Dear Chair Donovan:

I am writing to share the Department of Human Services' support of H7934, with a proposed amendment. H7934 is a joint resolution supporting the recommendations of a coordinated model for early childhood programming in Rhode Island. As the committee reviews this resolution, I am sharing additional historical context to aid in the committee's decision.

As part of Article 10 of the Governor's Enacted FY 2023 Budget, a Working Group on Early Childhood Governance was charged with examining systems, structures, and authorities that govern early childhood programs in the state. The main analyzed models for early childhood programming revolved around the creation of a new child care office and a coordination model that would build on the state's current strengths.

An analysis by the team at Foresight Law + Policy and Watershed Advisors in its December 2023 report stated, "*Rhode Island's current governance structure for early childhood is "Coordination," meaning that different services are housed in different agencies – thereby requiring Coordination among those agencies. Stakeholders across the system recognize the efforts of state agencies to work together more effectively in recent years, and the Working Group seeks to continue that progress. Accordingly, the Working Group recommends that the state build upon its strengths by remaining in the Coordination model.*"

In addition to the report recommendations, the Early Learning Council (ELC) — comprised of council members appointed by Governor McKee and key leaders representing the early learning and development field—voted against creating a new cabinet-level office. DHS and RIDE have a shared understanding that the coordinated model will best serve the interests of the early childhood sector. Through our partnership, we have already started examining ways to enhance our work without diverting the resources and funding that would be necessary to establish and transition to a new office.

DHS is committed to strengthening our coordinated model, and to providing measures of progress as supported in this joint resolution. As such, we kindly ask that DHS be recognized as an important partner of this resolution and be added to the list of agencies who would receive a duly certified copy of this resolution. With DHS's role in this governing structure alongside RIDE, DHS respectfully proposes the following amendment be made to 7934 in green, beginning on page 2, line 6, for the committee's consideration.

"RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to the Early Childhood Governance Working Group, the Children's Cabinet,

~~Children's Friend Board of Directors, the Department of Human Services, and Early Childhood Education/RI Department of Education.~~"

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director
RI Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services
The Honorable Justine A. Caldwell
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy