ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN
Right from the Start is a legislative and budget campaign to advance state policies for young children and their families in Rhode Island. During the COVID-19 crisis, it has become even more clear that policies and programs that help families with young children are essential for a strong economy and public health. Investments now will help our state and Rhode Island’s young children and families weather this crisis and emerge stronger on the other side.

UPDATED PRIORITIES, MAY 2020

- **Enact strong state and federal revenue policies** to maintain, expand and improve essential programs that are a lifeline for children and families. We support the Revenue for Rhode Island proposal and other equitable strategies to increase state and federal resources that will help families with young children.

- **Ensure child care can reopen and operate while meeting new, more rigorous health and safety standards.** Increase the rates for the Child Care Assistance Program to extend the temporary pandemic rates throughout FY21 to meet the required federal equal access standard that was needed pre-COVID. Additional supports will be needed to help programs and staff meet health and safety standards and to care for significantly stressed babies, young children, and families, while also caring for themselves. Safe, healthy, and high-quality child care options are essential for economic recovery and public health.

- **Implement strategies to improve the wages of early educators** working with children and families during the pandemic and beyond. Most middle-class families cannot afford to pay any more for child care than they currently pay, yet programs will need increased staffing levels and should ensure wages are above $20/hour. Wages can be improved by increasing state rates, providing adequate funding through contracts, and offering wage supplements.

- **Improve our state’s paid family leave program (Temporary Caregivers Insurance)** to match national benchmarks by increasing wage replacement rates and extending the number of weeks. We need to improve Rhode Island’s paid family leave policy so all parents, and especially lower-wage earning parents, can have adequate income to remain at home with newborns, adoptive, and foster children for at least 12 weeks.

- **Cover community-based doula services through Medicaid and private health insurance.** Invest in building, supporting, and sustaining the doula workforce and infrastructure in the state as a strategy to reduce racial and economic disparities in maternal and child health outcomes.

- **Sustain our network of voluntary, evidence-based family home visiting programs** by allocating state funds as a Medicaid match to fund remote and in-person services that help parents during these critical early years.

- **Expand access to the Rhode Island Pre-K and sustain state-funded Head Start programs.** These are high-quality programs that help get children on track for school success. The RI Pre-K program serves a diverse group of 1,164 four-year-old children in high-needs communities. RI Pre-K can be delivered through distance learning approaches and is offered by public schools, Head Start agencies, and child care programs. Rhode Island also invests funding to serve 130 children in Head Start.

- **Pass the affordable housing bond** which will expand affordable housing and help early learning programs improve their facilities.

CAMPAIGN STEERING COMMITTEE

- Beautiful Beginnings
- Economic Progress Institute
- Latino Policy Institute
- Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health
- Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
- Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association

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