



December 2, 2020

Director Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
Rhode Island Department of Health
3 Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908

Re: Add Data About COVID-19 Cases in Licensed Child Care and Early Learning Programs to the State's COVID Data Dashboard and Prioritize Voluntary COVID-19 Vaccination Availability for Rhode Island's Early Childhood Workforce in Final Vaccination Distribution Plan

Dear Director Alexander-Scott:

Thank you for your leadership during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The members of the Right from the Start campaign deeply appreciate your dedicated work to keep Rhode Islanders safe and healthy during this public health emergency.

We write today to urge you to share data on the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) website about COVID-19 cases in licensed child care and early learning programs, just as RIDOH is doing for K-12 public and private schools, and for congregate care facilities. Several other states are regularly publishing updated COVID-19 data associated with licensed child care facilities (see Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, and Virginia). For equity reasons, we believe the early educators who work in the field (almost all are low-wage women, many are people of color) and families who use these programs (many of whom are low-wage frontline workers) deserve to have access to the same data that is provided to educators and families who send their children to K-12 public and private schools.

Also for equity reasons, we also ask you to prioritize Rhode Island's essential early childhood workforce (including child care, public and private preschool, Head Start and Early Head Start, family home visiting and Early Intervention program staff, and doulas) in the state's final plan to distribute FDA-approved voluntary COVID-19 vaccinations. Thank you for including child care educators in Phase 2 of the current draft interim plan. We understand that initially there will be a very limited supply of COVID-19 vaccines. We ask that the state adopt a broad definition of early educators (beyond child care), that they be given the same priority as K-12 educators, and that the vaccinations be voluntary. Prioritizing the availability of voluntary COVID-19 vaccinations for this workforce of over 3,000 will be critical to stabilizing staffing for these essential programs, reducing community spread of the virus, protecting our early educator workforce, and protecting the thousands of young children and families who depend on early childhood programs and services.

Thanks to the leadership of Governor Raimondo, RIDOH, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Education, Rhode Island's child care, Head Start, and Pre-Ks have been able to safely reopen, and evidence to date indicates that child care is not associated with significant secondary spread of the coronavirus so long as safety protocols are followed, including quarantining children and staff who have been exposed. This is highly encouraging. Nevertheless, many Rhode Island child care and early learning programs report that they have had to close classrooms and programs when employees, children, and family members were ordered to quarantine due to exposure to COVID or when they contracted COVID. During the months of June and July alone, over 850 individuals were ordered to quarantine for 52 confirmed or probable cases of



COVID-19 associated with a licensed child care or early learning program. Early access to voluntary vaccines for staff will help programs stabilize staffing and reduce the need to close classrooms and programs when individuals are quarantined.

For the reasons stated above, the Right from the Start campaign urges RIDOH to regularly publish data about COVID-19 cases in licensed child care and early learning programs and we request that Rhode Island's early educator workforce be included in the early rounds of distribution of FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccines for voluntary vaccinations in the State's final vaccination dissemination plan.

Once again, thank you for your leadership during these difficult times.

Sincerely,

The Right from the Start Campaign Steering Committee

Leanne Barrett, Rhode Island Kids Count ; Marcela Betancur, Latino Policy Institute; Susan Dickstein, RI Association for Infant Mental Health; Rachel Flum, Economic Progress Institute; Lisa Hildebrand, RI Association for the Education of Young Children; Khadija Lewis Khan, Beautiful Beginnings; Mary Varr, Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association