Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act 2022

H-7283 (Casimiro) & S-2235 (Cano)

High-quality early childhood programs have effective educators who work with children and families to support young children’s rapid brain development. However, many early educators earn very low wages ($12.11/hour for child care educators and $14.32/hour for preschool educators). Most skilled educators can earn more money working with older children, in other settings, and in other fields. Effective professionals are leaving the field for better paying jobs. Rhode Island needs to establish state goals and find solutions that will attract and retain skilled, qualified, diverse educators in essential programs to ensure children get a strong start in school and life.

Why is compensation important?

- Children, families, and programs experience high turnover of educators, disrupting relationships that are essential to improve outcomes for children and families.
- Programs have a “hole in the bucket” and are constantly needing to recruit, hire, and train new staff which drains program resources.
- Families have difficulty accessing services:
  - Child care programs have significant challenges attracting and retaining effective educators, which results in empty classrooms and waiting lists for families.
  - Early Intervention, a public education program required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to serve infants and toddlers with developmental challenges, has a statewide waiting list because they have difficulty attracting and retaining staff with non-competitive wages.
  - RI Pre-K classrooms in community-based settings lose teachers to higher paying jobs in public school districts, creating challenges for programs that meet the needs of working families.
  - Family Home Visiting programs often must suspend enrollment when staff resign.

The Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act:

1) Requires the state to develop goals and a plan to improve the compensation of effective early educators in Child Care, RI Pre-K, Early Intervention, and Family Home Visiting.

2) Instructs the Rhode Island Children’s Cabinet to address the crisis the industry is facing in attracting and retaining staff by establishing a cross-departmental target wage scale for early educators and by advancing strategies to improve compensation so there is parity with public school educators with comparable credentials.

3) Provides $5 million in funding to pilot the Child Care WAGE$ model in Rhode Island, a research-based model designed to improve compensation and reduce turnover of qualified and skilled early educators working in child care settings. The program would provide tiered wage supplements to ensure the most qualified and skilled early educators can remain working in the programs that helped them earn their credentials and gain valuable skills promoting the learning and development of infants, toddlers, and young children.

4) Establishes an Early Educator Registry, a critical piece of data infrastructure needed to share information and opportunities directly with early educators, understand and address the needs of this essential workforce, and track improvements in staff recruitment, retention, and turnover over time. There are at least 37 states that have a statewide early educator registry.