



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Creating a New Early Childhood Campaign in Rhode Island: Right from the Start

Introduction

When advocates work together, leveraging diverse resources and expertise to advance shared priorities, the potential policy change for babies and families is far greater than what could be achieved by any one organization on their own.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT joined *Think Babies* as a state partner in 2018, convening public and private stakeholders to engage in an infant-toddler landscape analysis and collaboratively identify a set of shared infant-toddler policy priorities with technical assistance support from ZERO TO THREE. As efforts to advance these priorities moved forward, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and partners identified a need for a branded, public facing Campaign that could serve as an umbrella for the work with a shared public identity, provide a structure to facilitate collaborative advocacy action among the partners, and increase the visibility and awareness of issues facing young children and families in Rhode Island. This brief will focus on the elements and results of the Right from the Start Campaign, a legislative and budget Campaign to advance state policies for young children and their families in Rhode Island.

Building the Campaign

Right from the Start Rhode Island is convened and coordinated by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and led by a diverse Steering Committee which works together to adopt a set of shared priorities and key strategies, updated annually. The Campaign includes an explicit focus on equity and prioritizes lifting up the lived experience of families. Key Campaign priorities include:

- High quality affordable child care
- RI Pre-K and Head Start
- Early educator investment
- Maternal and child health and mental wellness
- Paid family leave
- Early Intervention
- Family home visiting

The Campaign takes a multifaceted approach to building public and political engagement and then translating engagement into action. Key components include:

- **Strategic events at key points throughout the year**

- Annual kick off event at the beginning of the year to share and promote the Campaign’s legislative and budget agenda (often featuring the Governor and legislative leaders)
- Campaign Zoom events to provide a deeper dive into each of the year’s priorities to equip advocates with the information they need to engage effectively
- *Strolling Thunder* rally and parent meetings with policymakers

Right from the Start Steering Committee Members:

- Beautiful Beginnings
- Economic Progress Institute
- Latino Policy Institute
- Parents Leading for Educational Equity
- Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health
- Rhode Island Head Start Association
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
- Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children



- **Digital advocacy infrastructure**

- Campaign website which includes information about the Campaign and its members, current Campaign priorities, resources, and regular blog posts
- Right from the Start social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter that are regularly updated and mutually reinforcing with Campaign Steering Committee member accounts
- Advocacy action alerts on behalf of the Campaign using the Voter Voice tool

- **Materials that tell the story**

- High-quality short videos featuring parents and professionals sharing their lived experiences and urging action on policy priorities. Advocacy videos produced so far focus on paid family leave, coverage of perinatal doula services, early educator compensation, and funding for child care, family home visiting, and early intervention
- Advocacy profiles featuring parent and provider stories

- **Earned media**

- Campaign press releases and media advisories, story pitches to local media, and key resource for media inquiries
- Campaign Steering Committee members work together to identify families, programs, educators, and experts for opportunities



“The Right from the Start Campaign has been successful precisely because we have a diverse coalition that speaks with unity on child and family policies, combining the voices of policy experts, medical professionals, child care providers, advocates, and most importantly the parents of young children.”

–Leanne Barrett

Right from the Start
Campaign Coordinator
and Senior Policy Analyst,
Rhode Island

- **Timely communications**

- Campaign priorities identified and delivered to the Governor’s office and state agency leaders early enough to influence each year’s budget proposal
- Regular communication with legislative champions
- Encouraging and organizing testimony for key bill hearings
- Providing Spanish-English interpretation for Campaign events and coalition meetings
- Regular Campaign newsletters and weekly updates during legislative session on advocacy opportunities to encourage people to get involved

- **Federal advocacy**

- Regular communication and advocacy with Rhode Island’s Congressional Delegation about relevant federal policy and budget priorities

Making Progress for Families with Young Children in Rhode Island

Spring 2018

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Partners with ZERO TO THREE's *Think Babies* Campaign

Winter 2019

Right from the Start Campaign launches

2021 Legislative Session

Sustained pandemic rates for 6 more months and ensured new, regular rates were higher than pre-pandemic rates for the Child Care Assistance Program

Established statutory cap on family copayments for the Child Care Assistance Program (no more the 7% of family income).

Authorized pilot program to allow low-income college students to be eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program.

Required Medicaid and commercial insurance coverage for perinatal visits for First Connections.

Expanded paid family leave/Temporary Caregivers Insurance program from 4 to 6 weeks.

Required Medicaid and commercial insurance coverage for perinatal doula services.

2018 Legislative Session

Increased and established tiered rates for the Child Care Assistance Program with the greatest increases going to infants and toddlers.

2019 Legislative Session

Increased rates for the Child Care Assistance Program

Moved child care licensing to the same agency that manages the Child Care Assistance Program.

Sustained RI Pre-K seats in high-quality diverse delivery system by increasing state funding as federal grant resources expired.

2020 Legislative Session

- Approved ballot questions to authorize bonds for affordable housing and early learning facilities (ratified by voters in March 2021).

- Authorized Child Care Assistance Program to pay based on enrollment rather than attendance and waive family co-payments during the pandemic.

- Increased rates for the Child Care Assistance Programs significantly during the pandemic.

2022 Legislative Session

- Secured two years of pandemic retention bonuses for child care educators and two years of stabilization funding for the Part C Early Intervention Program.
- Increased rates for the Child Care Assistance Program.
- Lifted family income eligibility limits for the Child Care Assistance Program to 200% FPL.
- Made low-income college students permanently eligible for the Child Care Assistance Program
- Established a requirement for the state to develop a plan to address early childhood workforce issues, including compensation.
- Expanded the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood workforce development program
- Established a Task Force to develop recommendations regarding the governance of early childhood programs in the state.
- Established a requirement for the state to develop a plan to expand RI Pre-K in a diverse delivery system while ensuring there are no adverse impacts on infant/toddler child care.
- Passed the Infant/Early Childhood Mental Wellness Act, requiring a Task Force and state plan to promote the adoption of best practices for screening, assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health challenges among children under age 6 with Medicaid insurance.
- Secured Medicaid rate increases including a permanent 45% rate increase for infants and toddlers receiving Part C Early Intervention services and a temporary Medicaid rate increase for the First Connections family visiting program.
- Expanded Medicaid coverage from 60 days postpartum to 12 months postpartum, regardless of immigration status and restored Rite Care/Medicaid coverage for children regardless of immigration status.
- Passed the Let RI Vote Act, expanding access to voting in the state.

Results

Since its launch, Right from the Start has built strategic, collaborative relationships among many advocacy partners and champions (including strong partnerships with the Rhode Island chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Service Employees International Union 1199 (SEIU), and the Women’s Fund of Rhode Island), built infrastructure for impactful advocacy, increased the visibility of the issues facing young children and families in Rhode Island, elevated the voices of those with lived experience, and cultivated relationships with legislative champions. The results include not only the number of policy wins, but the fact that policies are better informed by diverse perspectives including those most impacted. Right from the Start is poised to continue collaborative efforts to advance equitable policies for young children and families in Rhode Island in the years to come.

“By bringing parents to the table to help identify advocacy priorities, providing policy support, and facilitating many opportunities for parents to engage directly with their elected officials and the media, Right from the Start has empowered our parents to share their stories and to shape meaningful state policy changes.”

–Ramona Santos Torres

Executive Director, Parents Leading for Educational Equity



Right from the
Start

