



Right from the
Start

2023 Legislative and Budget Priorities

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

With large state budget surpluses for the past two years, increased federal support for early childhood programs, and a strong economy, now is the time for Rhode Island to invest in building strong systems to make the state the best place to have a family. Rhode Island needs state budget investments and policies that help ensure *ALL* Rhode babies and young children, regardless of zip code, race, ethnicity, or family income, get off to the right start in life!

PRIORITIES



Families have affordable, reliable, high-quality child care (Diaz/Cano):

Restore \$48 million in state funding and use the \$4 million in new federal funding to pass the **RI Child Care is Essential Act** so that all families at or below the State Median Income can receive help paying for child care, all provider rates for the RI Child Care Assistance Program meet or exceed federal standards, and the outdated and inequitable child support enforcement requirement is removed.



Prevent permanent closure of any RI Pre-K, Head Start, or Early Head Start classrooms (McNamara/Gallo & Governor's Budget Proposal):

Restore and provide \$6.5 million in state funding for Head Start and Early Head Start programs statewide while also investing \$7 million to sustain the RI Pre-K program. Increase teaching staff wages to match similarly qualified K-12 teacher wages. Currently, there are 40 RI Pre-K classrooms, 30 Head Start classrooms, and 9 Early Head Start classrooms at risk of permanent closure by July 2023.



Invest in the First Connections family home visiting program and plan for future (Giraldo/Valverde):

Make the long-needed (22 years!) rate increase permanent for the Rhode Island First Connections newborn home visiting program to prevent program collapse. Develop a plan to sustain and expand voluntary family home visiting services, including meeting the new state funding requirements, so that high-quality programs are offered to all families who could benefit.



Establish goals and invest to recruit and retain skilled early educators (Casimiro/Cano & Diaz/DiMario):

Pass the **RI Early Educator Investment Act** to establish statewide compensation goals for early educators. Fund the Child Care WAGE\$ pilot program to increase compensation for skilled child care educators. Implement Kentucky's strategy to recruit and retain child care educators by providing free child care for all child care educators. The workforce that supports young children's early learning and development is made up almost exclusively of women (and disproportionately women of color) and has among the lowest wages in the state @ \$13.26 per hour for child care and @ \$14.08 per hour for preschool – in the same range or lower than fast food workers, dishwashers, laundry workers, animal caretakers, and retail sales workers.



Improve the RI Paid Family Leave program to match our neighboring states (Kazarian/Lawson & Diaz/Miller):

Increase the wage replacement level so all parents, and especially lower wage-earning parents, can have adequate income to stay home and care for newborns, adoptive, and foster children. Expand the number of weeks offered to families to meet national standards -- at least 12 weeks for each parent. Rhode Island was a leader in establishing a paid family leave program in 2013, but we have now fallen behind, offering the lowest wage replacement rate and fewest number of weeks of leave of any state with a paid leave program.



Stabilize health care access for children from birth through age 5 (Slater/Lauria):

Ensure babies and young children with Medicaid/RIte Care insurance (about 50% of all young children in RI) have consistent access to preventive, specialized, and emergency health care by adopting continuous Medicaid eligibility for all children under age 6. No family should have to worry about whether they can afford to bring their little ones in to see a doctor for checkups, screenings, immunizations, or illness.



End deep child poverty by improving RI Works (Handy/Murray):

Thousands of children under age 6 rely on RI Works cash assistance to help meet their basic needs. Adopt RI Works policies recommended by the **Raising Rhode Island Coalition** by updating the cash assistance benefit annually to ensure children do not live in deep poverty, repealing the full family sanction, allowing pregnant women to receive support earlier, and restoring eligibility to legal permanent residents.



Raise more state general revenue (Alzate, Murray):

Pass the Revenue for Rhode Island Act, a fair share tax strategy, that will bring in much-needed revenue to invest in K-12 education, child care and early learning programs, and transportation infrastructure to help get more people to work.

Right from the Start Steering Committee



Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children

