



Right from the
Start

2024 Legislative and Budget Detailed Priorities

Rhode Island needs state budget investments and policies that help ensure *ALL* Rhode Island babies and young children, regardless of zip code, race, ethnicity, or family income, get off to the right start in life! Investments in young children and families strengthen our economy now and ensure a bright future.

Early Care and Education

Solve the Early Educator Staffing Crisis

- ✚ Expand and continue the *Child Care for Child Care Educators program (Diaz/DiMario)* to include Early Intervention staff. Remove the household income limit by providing eligibility for early educators to the Child Care Assistance Program as a protected population with no copayments. This program will end in July 2024 unless continued in statute.
- ✚ Pass the *Early Educator Compensation Stabilization Act (Donovan/Cano)* to:
 - Invest \$2.5 million to continue the Child Care WAGE\$ national model program to provide substantial wage supplements to recognize, reward, and retain qualified and skilled early educators with CDAs, associate's, and bachelor's degrees. This program will end in summer 2024 without new funding.
 - Invest \$5 million to continue retention bonuses @ \$3,000/year for some early educators – those who are lower-wage, consistent, frontline child care staff -- beyond the projected end date in September 2024 to prevent loss of staff/closure of more classrooms and programs.
- ✚ Pass the *Early Care and Education Workforce Data Act (Shallcross Smith/Cano)* to produce an annual data report on the status of the workforce (turnover, etc.)

Expand and Strengthen the RI Child Care Assistance Program (Diaz/Cano, Diaz/DiMario)

- ✚ Remove the outdated child support enforcement requirement in statute. Only a few states have ever imposed this requirement and those that did are removing it

from the subsidy process (even Mississippi).

- ✚ Invest approximately \$12 million to raise family income eligibility to the federal standard for CCAP, helping about half of the families in Rhode Island with babies and young children. A family of three with earnings up to \$81,641 should qualify (85% of State Median Income) and be able to retain their subsidy up to \$96,048 (100% of State Median Income).
- ✚ Invest \$6 million to provide a 50% rate increase for infants under 18 months in the RI Child Care Assistance Program to stabilize and expand access to quality care for the age group in greatest need.
- ✚ Increase provider rates for all ages of children in the RI Child Care Assistance Program to meet or exceed federal standards.

Expand RI Pre-K Equitably in Birth – 5 Context (McNamara/Gallo, Governor's FY25 budget)

As Pre-K expands, ensure there is adequate investment to:

- ✚ Provide compensation parity for all teachers of publicly funded preschool classrooms (RI Pre-K and Head Start) equal to public Kindergarten teachers with similar qualifications and experience. Right now, there is a \$25,000 gap in pay.
- ✚ Sustain and expand state investments in Head Start and Early Head Start as part of the state's plan to achieve universal access to preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- ✚ Establish and fund a 30% infant/toddler spending benchmark in statute as part of RI Pre-K expansion, so that for every \$10 million of new funding invested in RI Pre-K expansion there will be at least \$3 million of new funding invested to sustain and expand access to high-quality infant and toddler child care and early learning.
- ✚ Allow and support family child care programs to participate in delivering RI Pre-K.
- ✚ Remove state requirements restricting enrollment based on child residence for RI Pre-K programs in community-based settings to promote continuity and family choice.

Sustain and Strengthen Head Start & Early Head Start (McNamara/Gallo, Governor's FY25 budget)

- ✚ Continue the \$4.2 million state investment in the Head Start and Early Head Start model as part of the state's plan to achieve universal access to preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds.
- ✚ Ensure compensation parity for Head Start and RI Pre-K teachers equal to comparably qualified Kindergarten teachers.

Raise More State General Revenue for Child Care/Early Learning (Alzate/Murray)

- ✚ Enact the Revenue for Rhode Islanders millionaire's fair share tax strategy to bring in at least \$50 million in new state revenue to invest in child care and early learning programs.

Health & Development

Pass the *Act to Stabilize Health Coverage for Young Children* (Slater/Lauria)

- ✚ Join 12 other leading states and DC by adopting continuous Medicaid coverage for all children under age 6. Ensure babies and young children with Medicaid insurance (about 50% of all young children in RI) have consistent access to preventive, specialized, and emergency health care.

End Waiting Lists for Early Intervention (Cotter/Valverde, Governor's FY25 budget)

- ✚ Provide a 25% Medicaid rate increase to fully staff Early Intervention programs to end waiting lists and serve all children in need.
- ✚ Establish an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for rates.
- ✚ Add Early Intervention staff to the *Child Care for Child Care Educators* program (and remove household income limit). See this also under "Solve the Early Educator Staffing Crisis above).

Establish an Early Childhood IDEA Task Force, Birth – K Entry (Carson/Valverde)

- ✚ Create a public-private task force to develop a comprehensive financing and staffing plan to ensure all children from birth to Kindergarten entry receive high-quality Early Childhood IDEA services (across both Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education).

Save First Connections Newborn Family Home Visiting (Giraldo/Valverde)

- ✚ Make the long-needed (22 years!) rate increase permanent for the Rhode Island First Connections home visiting program to prevent substantial rate cuts scheduled for July 1.
- ✚ Establish an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for home visiting rates.
- ✚ Develop a plan to sustain and expand voluntary family home visiting services, including meeting the new state funding requirements, so that high-quality home visiting programs are offered to all families who could benefit.

Meet Maternal and Young Children's Mental Health Needs

- ✚ Develop a Rhode Island Early Childhood Mental Health Professional Hub to train and support professionals to better treat mental health challenges of children under age 6. (Fogarty/DiMario)
- ✚ Sustain the MomsPRN and PediPRN consultation programs that are helping perinatal and pediatric care providers effectively manage maternal and pediatric mental health challenges. (Shallcross Smith/DiMario)

Family Economic Security

Improve Paid Family Leave

- ✚ Expand from 6 weeks to 12 weeks of paid family leave to meet national standards and match CT and MA programs. (Giraldo/Lawson)
- ✚ Increase the wage replacement level to 90% so all parents, and especially lower wage-earning parents, can have adequate income to stay home and care for newborns, adoptive, and foster children. (Diaz/Miller)

Improve the RI Works Cash Assistance Program (Handy/Murray)

Adopt RI Works policies recommended by the *Raising Rhode Island Coalition*:

- ✚ Update the cash assistance benefit to ensure children do not live in deep poverty (below 50% FPL)
- ✚ Adopt an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA).
- ✚ Repeal the full family sanction.
- ✚ Restore eligibility to legal permanent residents.

Increase the State Earned Income Tax Credit (Felag and O'Brien)

- ✚ Increase Rhode Island's refundable EITC to 30% of the federal credit, comparable to policy in place in CT and MA.