

## Testimony in Support of HB-6019

### Infant/Toddler Funding Set Aside

#### House Committee on Finance

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**The Economic Progress Institute strongly support Representative Donovan's HB-6019,** which would continue the 15% set aside of RI Pre-Kindergarten expanding funding, approximately – \$1.1 Million – to be directed towards stabilizing and strengthening Rhode Island's early child care and education system.

All children deserve access to high-quality education. Unfortunately, Rhode Island has a severe staffing shortage in early care and education programs that has destabilized the industry, made high-quality care hard to find, and made it difficult for parents to get back to work. Rhode Island needs to invest in our early educators to reopen classrooms, decrease childcare costs, and shorten waiting lists. This funding would help preserve the supply of infant and toddler child care, retain and competitively compensate high-quality early childhood educators, and improve the quality of care.

Early care and education programs, such as Head Start, Early Intervention, and the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), are critical resources connecting parents with babies and young children with educational and developmental support. An accessible, affordable, and high-quality Early Care and Education system has been proven to improve parents', especially mothers', employment and improve children's academic success, social-emotional development, and lifelong employment and health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> These programs not only support the growth and development of Rhode Island's young children; they also are critical for working parents and our state economy.

The Economic Progress Institute strongly urges the Committee to continue setting aside a portion of RI Pre-K expansion funds to be directed towards strengthening access to high-quality infant and toddler early care and education. These innovative and successful programs such as the Child Care Assistance for Early Educators Pilot, Early Head Start, and workforce development programs, all have been proven to retain and recruit highly qualified early childhood educators. These investments in Rhode Island's youngest children will yield great long-term benefits for infants and toddlers, their families, the communities they live in, and our state's economy.

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<sup>1</sup> [Children's Learning and Development Benefits from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of the Evidence, ACF, 2023](#)