

Testimony in Support of *HB-7317*

Rhode Island Early Educator Workforce Act

House Committee on Finance

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The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative Donovan's HB-7317, which directs the Departments of Human Services and Education to collaborate to sustain and strengthen existing workforce development and compensation programs for educators working in licensed child care and early learning programs statewide.

Qualified early educators are necessary for Rhode Island's children to have the best outcomes. Quality early care and education are the building blocks for children's academic success, social-emotional development, and lifelong employment and health outcomes. The current child care workforce faces issues with recruitment, low wages, and retention. Rhode Island needs to invest in our early educators to reopen classrooms, decrease child care costs, and shorten waiting lists.

Rhode Island has a severe staffing crisis in early care and education programs that has destabilized high-quality care and support for infants, toddlers, and their families; the staffing crisis has also harmed workers and the economy. The three initiatives that are helping stabilize, retain and recruit the early care and education workforce are: 1. the Child Care WAGE\$, which provides wage supplements to help keep highly skilled and lower-wage early educators in early care and education classrooms; 2. T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Workforce Development program, which provides eligible early childhood educators with scholarships to advance in their careers; 3. Early Childhood Registered Apprenticeship program, which specially targets infant and toddler educators, combines paid on-the-job learning with higher education to progressively increase early educators' skill levels and wages.

Representative Donovan's HB-7317 would maintain the \$1.0 Million in funding for Child Care WAGE\$ program to increase retention of credentialed early educators. Additionally, this bill would codify into statute the T.E.A.C.H. program and the Registered Apprenticeship program, which are workforce development and staff retention programs for early educators. These critical programs have been proven to be successful and necessary in supporting recruitment and retention of high-quality early educators.

These investments in Rhode Island's early educators will yield great long-term benefits, not only for this essential workforce, but also for infants and toddlers, their families, the communities they live in, and our state's economy. We urge passage.