

Testimony in Support of *HB-8163*
Rhode Island Pre-K Education Act
House Committee on Finance
April 28, 2026
Divya Nair, Senior Policy Analyst, Economic Progress Institute

The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative McNamara’s HB-8163, which creates guidelines to sustain and strengthen access to essential parts of the early care and education system. All children deserve access to high-quality early education. Early care and education programs, such as Head Start, Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), and Pre-K, support the growth and development of Rhode Island’s babies, young children, and their families. Quality early care and education are the building blocks for children’s academic success, social emotional development, and lifelong employment and health outcomes.

The Pre-K Education Act sets a goal to expand prekindergarten access as funds are available through both Pre-K and Head Start, so that at least 70% of all three- and four-year-olds could enroll in either program. Rhode Island’s Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP) and Head Start enrollment have decreased by 29% and 39%, respectively, while enrollment in Pre-K has increased by more than 600%. Almost one in three Rhode Island three- and four-year olds are enrolled in a Head Start or Pre-K program.¹ Public investments in early education produce significant long-term benefits for children, such as improved education, economic health, and social outcomes. Additionally, a mixed delivery system has many benefits, including increasing capacity to serve more children; providing families with choice in the environment they prefer for their children; and supporting small businesses.²

Additionally, Representative McNamara’s HB-8163 also includes guidelines for competitive wages for Pre-K and Head Start early educators. In 2024, Rhode Island Pre-K and Head Start teachers were earning \$29,000 and \$35,000 less annually than their public-school counterparts, respectively.³ Competitive wages are necessary for retaining and recruiting highly qualified early educators. Rhode Island needs to invest in our early educators to reopen classrooms, decrease childcare costs, and shorten waiting lists.

These investments in Rhode Island’s early education programs will yield long-term benefits, not only for our children, but also for their families, their teachers, their communities, and our state’s economy. The Economic Progress Institute urges passage.

¹ [Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, 2025](#)

² [State Preschool in a Mixed Delivery System: Lessons From Five States, Learning Policy Institute, 2023](#)

³ [RI Pre-K Expansion Factsheet, Right from the Start, 2025](#)