



To: Senate Committee on Finance
From: Linda Katz, Policy Director
Date: March 22, 2022
Re: Testimony in Support of S-2187 and H-7123 Article 12, Sections 7 and 8
Providing Rite Care Coverage to Children who are Undocumented

The Economic Progress Institute is pleased that the Governor's FY 2023 budget includes a proposal to use general revenue funds to provide Rite Care coverage for children who are undocumented. We thank Senator Cano for her leadership in promoting access to health coverage and care for all our children, sponsoring a bill last year that would extend coverage and resubmitting the bill in this session. We strongly support passage of S-2187 and the provisions in Sections 7 and 8 of Article 12 that amend the Rite Care law and authorize extending coverage to undocumented children.

Ensuring that all children are enrolled in the high-quality, cost-effective Rite Care program (which was originally designated "Rite Track" when the state first initiated expansion of health insurance coverage for children), makes sense not only because these newly eligible children will be able to access health care but as a public health measure. Children go to school together and play together without regard to their school-mates' or friends' immigration status. The past years have certainly demonstrated vividly how we are all connected and how what happens to one in our community impacts us all.

This is not the first time that Rhode Island would be providing Rite Care coverage for children regardless of immigration status. A bit of history: In 1996, Congress (unwisely) passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRAWORA), which limited eligibility for Medicaid and other federal benefits to people in certain statuses and imposed a five-year waiting period for legal permanent residents (green card holders). Rhode Island's response was to use general revenue funds to continue coverage for all lawfully present children and soon thereafter provided coverage for all children, regardless of status - including undocumented children. Several years later, during tight budget times, the state froze eligibility for these 'state funded' children. After the federal government restored Medicaid coverage for lawfully present children (without a waiting period), Rhode Island continued coverage for these children and re-opened eligibility but disenrolled those who did not qualify for federal funding – essentially the 'undocumented' children.

Rhode Island should now commit to **covering all kids** – its good public health policy. It is also good fiscal policy: if a child who is undocumented requires hospital care, they are eligible for Medicaid and the state is responsible for paying around half of the costs. Preventive and primary care can avoid unnecessary hospitalizations.

But bottom line, we should **cover all our kids** because we are all one family and it is the right thing to do.