



Testimony in Support of H5158  
House HEW Committee  
February 10, 2021

The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Representative Casimiro's bill, the "Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act", which requires the state to develop goals and a plan to improve the recruitment, development, compensation, and retention of effective early educators.

### **Quality early care and education is needed to close gaps in education attainment**

A report by the US Chamber of Commerce, "Workforce of Today: Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High Quality Child Care" highlights why quality child care is so important. As Katharine Stevens explains, **child care is the root of the achievement gap we see later in life.** Steven argues "...many children enter school unprepared to succeed, and schooling largely cannot close initial gaps". This missing link is quality child care.

Stevens continues, "if done right, it (child care) can serve two crucial purposes simultaneously: ensuring the healthy development of young children while enabling their parents to contribute as productive members of the workforce. By laying the crucial groundwork for tomorrow's workforce and supporting a strong workforce today, high-quality childcare builds our nation's human capital two generations at a time".<sup>i</sup>

Importantly, **high quality early childhood care and education requires a diverse, competent, well-compensated, and professionally supported workforce that is stable enough to build the relationships that support child development.** Yet, child care workers in Rhode Island are the lowest paid educators in the state at an average of \$12/hour. Our early learning market is sustained by learning professionals who forgo a living wage, despite the sophistication of their work. However, their patience is wearing thin, and we are seeing a crisis of staffing.

### **Inadequate compensation for early educators is resulting in a crisis of staff turnover**

Why focus on compensation for early educators? Because inadequate pay is creating high turnover of early educators throughout Rhode Island:

- More than 1 in 4 (27%) educators in child care centers leave the field
- More than 1 in 5 (22%) family home visitors leave the field
- More than 1 in 7 (15%) early interventionists leave the field<sup>ii</sup>

These statistics reflect pre-pandemic conditions. In addition to these statistics, a more recent pre-pandemic workforce needs assessment from 2019 shows that these conditions have worsened over time. In 2019, 77% of Family Visiting programs and 83% of Early Intervention programs assessed had turnover at the lead and/or assistant teacher level since 2018. In addition, 61% of center-based child care program directors reported turnover of teachers over the course of 2018-2019.<sup>iii</sup>

In regard to the child care industry specifically, programs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have had fewer tuition-paying families due to capacity limits. This means that programs have had decreased revenues while their operating costs have increased. A 2020 survey conducted by the Department of Human Services (DHS) aimed at understanding the impact of COVID-19 on RI child care programs found that programs have experienced, on average, a 76% increase in monthly costs associated with the implementation of new COVID-19 health and safety standards.<sup>iv</sup>

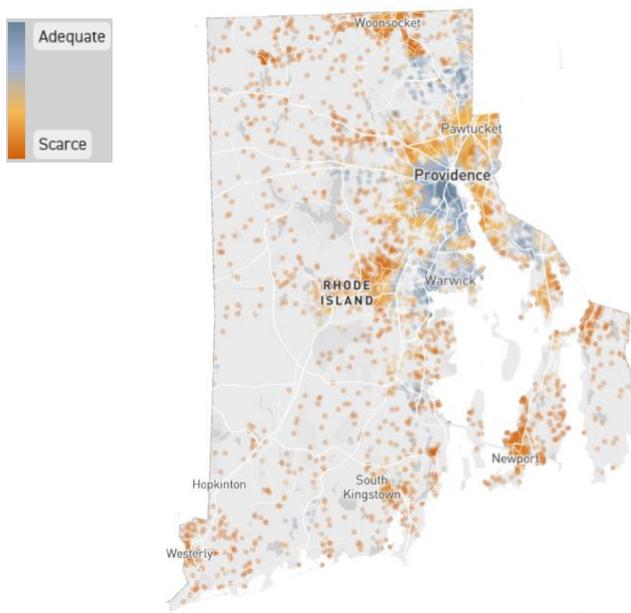
Further, a survey conducted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children found that 69% of child care programs reported that recruiting and retaining qualified staff has become more difficult since the pandemic. With new financial burdens and increasing turnover rates, child care programs struggle to survive, intensifying the presence of child care deserts throughout Rhode Island.<sup>v</sup>

**Insufficient staff leads to insufficient access, harming women and their children**

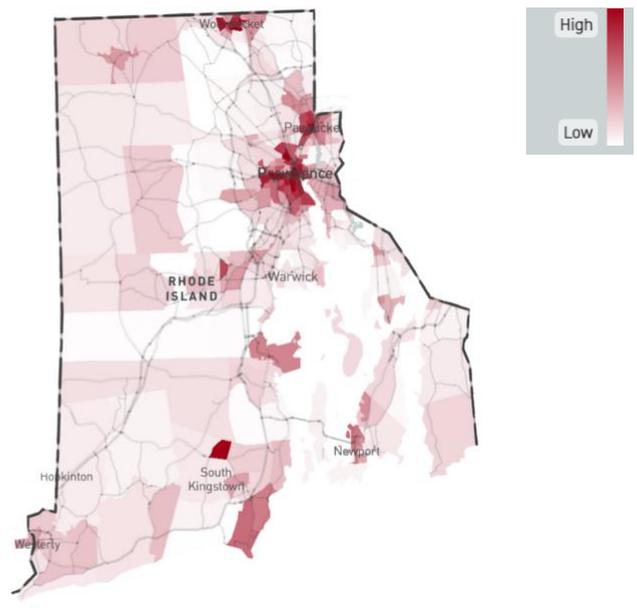
About half of Rhode Island’s population lives in a “child care desert”- a neighborhood or community in which child care options are lacking completely or have so few providers that there are more than three children for every licensed child care slot.<sup>vi</sup>

In Rhode Island, child care deserts are found throughout each county, and are prominent in many low and middle-income communities, such as Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, West Warwick, Bristol, and Newport.<sup>vii</sup>

**Child Care Supply\***



**Poverty\***



\*Current as of 2/10/21. For full map, see: <https://childcaredeserts.org/>

Significantly, child care deserts impact employment, as on average child care deserts have maternal labor force participation rates that are 3 percentage points lower than areas where child care is readily available. Existing research has found that providing low- and middle-income families with access to child care would enable an estimated 1.6 million more mothers to enter the workforce alone, helping to sustain and expand national and local workforces.<sup>viii</sup>

Pre-pandemic in Rhode Island, 94% of workers involuntarily working in part-time positions due to inadequate childcare were women.<sup>ix</sup> Without access to childcare pre-COVID-19, Rhode Island's low to modest-income women were forced to reduce work hours and were unable to attend educational trainings to upgrade work skills, both of which inhibited the growth of talent pools available for Rhode Island businesses.<sup>x</sup> COVID-19 has exacerbated this reality. Recent research shows that due to school and child care closures, mothers with young children have arranged reductions to their work hours that are 4-5 times greater than reductions arranged by fathers. Further, in September 2020 alone, four times as many women as men dropped out of the labor force.<sup>xi</sup> As mothers have been particularly burdened with child caregiving obligations over the pandemic, access to quality, affordable child care is a necessary precondition for Rhode Island's women to return to the workforce post-pandemic. However, for mothers living in child care deserts, which are predominantly in low and middle-income communities, this will likely not be possible. **Thus, investment in Rhode Island's child care workforce is critical now to prevent child care deserts from worsening across the state and barring mothers with low- and middle- incomes from Rhode Island's workforce.** Without state relief to aid child care programs retain talented educators, Rhode Island families, especially those with low-incomes, will be at-risk for lacking access to quality, affordable care needed to either remain employed during this pandemic or regain employment post-pandemic.

We urge the General Assembly to pass Representative Casimiro's bill so that the state can focus on building a stronger and more equitable child care and early education sector for all Rhode Island families and children. Rhode Island can buffer against the adverse impacts brought on by COVID-19 by establishing a cross-departmental target wage scale for early educators and advancing strategies to improve compensation so that there is parity with public school educators with comparable credentials.

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<sup>i</sup> Katharine B. Stevens, "Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare," U.S Chamber of Commerce Foundation, June 2017

<sup>ii</sup> Improving the Compensation and Retention of Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island: Recommendations of the Moving the Needle on Compensation Task Force, December 2019, Appendix 2

<sup>iii</sup> Abt Associates, Rhode Island PDG B-5 Workforce Needs Assessment Final Report, October 2019

<sup>iv</sup> RI Department of Human Services, "COVID-19 Impact Survey Series Summary of Key Findings", October- December 2020

<sup>v</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children, "Am I Next? Sacrificing to Stay Open, Child Care Providers Face a Bleak Future Without Relief", December 2020

<sup>vi</sup> Sarah Savage, "High-Quality Early Child Care: A Critical Piece of the Workforce Infrastructure," Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, May 2019, <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/one-time-pubs/high-quality-early-child-care.aspx>.

<sup>vii</sup> Rasheed Malik, Katie Hamm, Leila Schochet, Cristina Novoa, Simon Workman, & Steven Jessen-Howard, "America's Childcare Deserts in 2018," Center for American Progress, December 2018, [childcaredeserts.org/index.html?state=RI](http://childcaredeserts.org/index.html?state=RI)

<sup>viii</sup> Leila Schochet, "The Child Care Crisis Is Keeping Women Out of the Workforce," Center for American Progress, March 2019

<sup>ix</sup> Id.

<sup>x</sup> "Child Care in State Economies- 2019 Update," 2019

<sup>xi</sup> Julie Kashen, Sarah Jane Glynn, and Amanda Novello, "How COVID-19 Sent Women's Workforce Progress Backward", Center for American Progress, October 2020