Testimony in support for HB-5094

House Committee on Finance

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The Economic Progress Institute writes in support of Representative Casimiro’s HB-5094, which would require the state to develop a plan to improve the recruitment, development, compensation, and retention of high-quality early educators.

In Rhode Island, early educators' wages range from $13.26 to $14.06/hour, just slightly above the state’s minimum wage. Early educators with bachelor's degrees are earning 31% less than their peers working in the K-8 system. The early educator workforce is critical in providing RI's young children with early learning and development skills that are the foundation of their social, emotional, and cognitive development.

These are essential workers, yet they cannot make ends meet with their non-essential salaries. The early childhood education workforce in Rhode Island is primarily comprised of women - many of whom are women of color. The WAGE$ wage supplement pilot program, a critical part of this bill, is an education-based salary supplement program that has been proven to recruit and retain high quality, qualified professionals.

Currently, 30% of Rhode Island’s Head Start and Early Head Start, as well as 40 Pre-K classrooms, are closed due to staffing challenges. This affects more than 1,000 young children and their families. Children are on waiting lists and parents are struggling to perform their jobs while juggling caregiving commitments.

Representative Casimiro’s Early Educator Investment Act would ensure that the early childhood workforce receives competitive wages, children get the care and education they need to thrive, and parents are able to fully participate in the labor market.

1. [https://csscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/rhode-island/](https://csscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/states/rhode-island/)