Testimony in support of SB-463 and SB-492

Senate Committee on Education

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The Economic Progress Institute supports Senator Gallo’s SB-463, which would allocate sufficient resources to sustain all Rhode Island pre-kindergarten programs, including Pre-K classrooms, Head Start classrooms and Early Head Start classrooms. We are also writing in support of Senator Cano’s SB-492, which would mandate the state to develop goals and a plan to improve the recruitment, development, compensation, and retention of high-quality early educators.

Rhode Island is currently facing an early education crisis due in part to the low and noncompetitive wages for early childhood educators. Childcare educators in Rhode Island make $13.26/hour, while teachers in the K-12 system earn more than double that amount. The early educator workforce is critical in providing our young children with early learning and development skills that are the foundation of their social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Currently, 30% of Rhode Island’s Head Start and Early Head Start and 40 RI Pre-K classrooms are closed due to staffing challenges. If these programs are not sufficiently funded then they are at risk for permanent closure, affecting more than 1,000 young children and their families. This means that children are on waiting lists and parents are unable to join the workforce because of caregiving commitments.

Senator Gallo and Senator Cano’s bills would address the root causes of the crisis within Rhode Island’s early learning programs by funding these vital programs and the staff that provide essential, high-quality educational services to infants and toddlers and their families. This will ensure that children get the care and education they need to thrive, and that families can rejoin the workforce and maintain their financial stability.