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LC001598

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

Introduced By: Senators Cano, Murray, and DiMario

Date Introduced: March 07, 2023

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 112

4 RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

5 **16-112-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Early Educator
7 Investment Act."

8 **16-112-2. Legislative findings and purpose.**

9 The general assembly hereby finds that:

10 (1) Young children's healthy brain development and learning depends on consistent,
11 nurturing care and enriching learning opportunities at home and in early care and education settings.
12 Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape children's
13 brain architecture upon which all future learning and development is built.

14 (2) Many of the early educators and early childhood professionals in Rhode Island earn
15 very low wages even when they achieve credentials equivalent to kindergarten through grade
16 twelve (K-12) teachers and demonstrate effective practices. Child care, family home visiting, early
17 head start, head start, Rhode Island Pre-K, and Early Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with
18 Disabilities Education Act) programs across the state report difficulty attracting, developing, and
19 retaining effective early childhood professionals.

1 (3) A 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island found that
2 over forty percent (40%) of infant/toddler educators worry about having enough food to feed their
3 family and fifty percent (50%) worry about having enough money to pay for housing.

4 (4) The 2019 statewide survey also found that almost one-third (1/3) of early educators had
5 a second job to help make ends meet and almost two-thirds (2/3) reported that they plan to leave
6 their early education job if the compensation does not improve. And yet, most report that they enjoy
7 working with children and families and many have earned college credits and degrees in child
8 development and early education.

9 (5) A landmark report issued by the National Academy of Science in 2015 found that
10 educators of young children, including infants and toddlers, need the same high level of knowledge
11 and competencies as teachers of older children and that educational qualifications and
12 compensation of early educators should be equivalent to those of kindergarten through grade twelve
13 (K-12) teachers.

14 (6) According to 2021 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for
15 a child care teacher in Rhode Island was thirteen dollars and twenty-six cents (\$13.26) per hour and
16 the median wage for a preschool teacher in Rhode Island was fourteen dollars and eight cents
17 (\$14.08) per hour in the same range or below the hourly wages in the same range or lower than fast
18 food workers, dishwashers, laundry workers, animal caretakers, and retail sales workers.

19 (7) By enacting this chapter, the general assembly acknowledges the need to establish goals
20 and develop strategies to improve the compensation of early educators in order that programs can
21 attract, develop, and retain effective staff to care for and educate young children and provide
22 family-focused services.

23 **16-112-3. Establishment of wage benchmarks.**

24 (a) The children's cabinet established in § 42-72.5-1 shall work in collaboration with the
25 department of human services, the department of health, the executive office of health and human
26 services, and the department of education to establish goals to improve compensation, including
27 cross-departmental wage benchmarks for early educators linked to education levels above high
28 school and demonstrated competence working with children and families.

29 (b) The compensation benchmarks for early educators shall be developed to apply to
30 educators working in child care centers, family child care homes, Rhode Island Pre-K classrooms,
31 Early Head Start and Head Start Programs, family home visiting programs, and Early Intervention
32 (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) programs. The cross-departmental
33 compensation benchmarks for early educators shall promote parity with compensation of
34 kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) public school teachers for individuals with similar

1 credentials.

2 (c) In developing this cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators,
3 the children's cabinet may consider the findings and recommendations provided in the 2019
4 Moving the Needle on Compensation Task Force's report "Improving the Compensation and
5 Retention of Effective Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island" and Rhode Island occupational
6 wage data available through the U.S. Department of Labor and Rhode Island department of labor
7 and training.

8 **16-112-4. Developing strategies to increase compensation of early educators.**

9 Once the compensation benchmarks for early educators have been established, the
10 children's cabinet shall design strategies and estimate the cost to close the gap between current
11 wages and the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators, including parity
12 with public school teaching staff or individuals with similar credentials. In developing the plan, the
13 following components shall be considered:

14 (1) Continuation and expansion of the existing statewide, comprehensive, research-based
15 early childhood workforce development scholarship program established under § 16-87-4 to
16 include stronger and ongoing support for compensation, such as implementation of wage
17 supplements or regular stipends for early educators to lift annual income to meet or exceed the
18 compensation benchmarks for early educators.

19 (2) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to enable
20 programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the cross-departmental
21 compensation benchmarks for early educators.

22 (3) Contracts to early childhood programs to expand the availability of high-quality
23 services for young children and families with educators in the program paid wages that meet or
24 exceed the levels in the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators.

25 (4) Registered apprenticeships for early educators that support completion of college
26 coursework and attainment of college credentials while providing opportunities to develop high-
27 quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by master early educators. Apprenticeships
28 shall be designed and funded to enable successful participants to earn wages that meet or exceed
29 the levels in the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators.

30 **16-112-5. Reporting.**

31 The children's cabinet shall report back to the governor and general assembly on or before
32 December 1, 2023 with the cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators and
33 initial cost estimates for strategies and public funding needed to close the wage gaps for early
34 educators.

1 SECTION 2. Section 42-72.5-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-72.5 entitled
2 "Children's Cabinet" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **42-72.5-2. Policy and goals.**

4 The children's cabinet shall:

5 (1) Meet at least monthly to address all issues, especially those that cross departmental
6 lines, and relate to children's needs and services;

7 (2) Review, amend, and propose all interagency agreements necessary to provide
8 coordinated services to children;

9 (3) Produce an annual comprehensive children's budget, to be submitted with other budget
10 documents to the general assembly;

11 (4) Produce, by December 1, 2015, a comprehensive, five (5) year statewide plan and
12 proposed budget for an integrated state child service system. This plan shall be submitted to the
13 governor; the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate, and updated
14 annually thereafter;

15 (5) [Deleted by P.L. 2015, ch. 141, art. 5, § 21].

16 (6) Develop a strategic plan to coordinate and share data to foster interagency
17 communication, increase efficiency of service delivery, and simultaneously protect children's
18 legitimate expectations of privacy and rights to confidentiality. This shall include data-sharing with
19 research partners, pursuant to data-sharing agreements, that maintains data integrity and protects
20 the security and confidentiality of these records. Any such data-sharing agreements shall comply
21 with all privacy and security requirements of federal and state law and regulation governing the use
22 of such data. Any universal student identifier now in use by the state or developed in the future
23 shall not involve a student's social security number; and

24 (7) Establish and maintain updated cross-departmental compensation benchmarks for early
25 educators working in child care, Rhode Island Pre-K, Head Start, Early Head Start, family home
26 visiting, and Early Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
27 programs that aligns with compensation of similarly qualified kindergarten through grade twelve
28 (K-12) educators. These compensation benchmarks shall be posted on the children's cabinet's
29 website and updated annually using available data on wages.

30 SECTION 3. Title 40 of the General Laws entitled "HUMAN SERVICES" is hereby
31 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

32 CHAPTER 6.7

33 CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATOR REGISTRY

34 **40-6.7-1. Child care and early educator registry.**

1 On or before December 1, 2023, the department of human services shall implement a child
2 care and early educator registry that meets the recommended guidelines of the National Workforce
3 Registry Alliance, and includes information about staff who work directly with children in all
4 licensed child care centers and family child care homes in the state. The registry shall be designed
5 to support communication of important information and opportunities, including training
6 opportunities and opportunities to receive a wage supplement, directly to front-line child care and
7 early educators. The registry shall also be designed to help the state gather and maintain information
8 about the demographics and annual turnover of child care educators by key factors including
9 educational qualifications and age category of children they teach.

10 **40-6.7-2. Reporting.**

11 Annually, beginning on or before March 31, 2024, the department of human services shall
12 produce an annual report on the status of the child care educator registry and the characteristics of
13 the child care workforce, including demographic information, qualifications, and turnover data.
14 The report shall be shared with the general assembly, the children's cabinet, all licensed child care
15 centers and family child care homes, individuals participating in the registry, and posted on the
16 department's website for the general public.

17 **40-6.7-3. Pilot program.**

18 (a) On or before December 1, 2023, the department of human services shall design and
19 begin implementation of a five million dollars (\$5,000,000) pilot program to provide regular wage
20 supplements for child care educators. The program shall be designed to narrow or close the gap
21 between the actual wages of the child care educators and the compensation benchmarks for early
22 educators established by the children's cabinet.

23 (b) The department shall consider the design of the Infant/Toddler Educator Education and
24 Retention Awards demonstration program recommended in 2019 by the Moving the Needle on
25 Compensation's Task Force and the child care wages model and other wage supplemental models
26 implemented by at least fifteen (15) states.

27 (c) The pilot program shall include child care educators who work in both licensed child
28 care centers and family child care homes and shall be available statewide, with priority given to
29 child care educators who work with infants and toddlers and children enrolled in the child care
30 assistance program.

31 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION - RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

1 This act would charge the children's cabinet with establishing and annually updating cross-
2 departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators. This act would also charge the
3 children's cabinet and state agencies with developing strategies and estimating costs to improve the
4 compensation of early childhood educators in order that publicly funded early childhood programs
5 can attract and retain a qualified workforce. This act would further direct the department of human
6 services to implement a pilot program to provide regular wage supplements to child care educators
7 with a focus on attracting and retaining a qualified workforce to provide high-quality infant and
8 toddler care. Additionally, this act would direct the department of human services to implement an
9 early educator registry that meets national standards and produce annual Early Educator Workforce
10 reports with information from the registry about the characteristics of early educators, staffing
11 trends, and staff turnover levels statewide.

12 This act would take effect upon passage.

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