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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR WORKFORCE ACT

Introduced By: Senators Urso, Euer, Bissailon, Acosta, DiPalma, and Mack

Date Introduced: March 07, 2025

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The general assembly hereby finds that:

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

6 (2) Many of the early educators in Rhode Island earn very low wages even when they  
7 achieve credentials equivalent to kindergarten teachers and demonstrate effective practices.  
8 Licensed child care and early learning programs across the state report difficulty attracting,  
9 developing, and retaining effective early childhood professionals.

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

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

18 (5) A landmark report issued by the National Academy of Science found that educators of  
19 young children, including infants and toddlers, need the same high level of knowledge and

1 competencies as teachers of older children and that educational qualifications and compensation of  
2 early educators should be equivalent to those of kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) teachers.

3 (6) According to 2023 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for  
4 a child care teacher in Rhode Island was sixteen dollars and ninety-one cents (\$16.91) per hour, in  
5 the same range or below the hourly wages of parking lot attendants, maids and housekeepers,  
6 farmworkers, animal caretakers, and retail sales workers.

7 (7) By enacting this act, the general assembly acknowledges the need to sustain and  
8 strengthen strategies to help licensed child care and early learning programs attract, develop, and  
9 retain effective educators to care for and educate children.

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

12 CHAPTER 117

13 RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR WORKFORCE ACT

14 **16-117-1. Short title.**

15 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Early Educator  
16 Workforce Act."

17 **16-117-2. Stabilizing and strengthening the early educator workforce.**

18 The departments of human services and education, shall work in collaboration to:

19 (1) Allocate sufficient funds to continue the Rhode Island T.E.A.C.H. early childhood  
20 program, the statewide, comprehensive, research-based workforce development scholarship  
21 program established under § 16-87-4 to support attainment of the national Child Development  
22 Associate credential and completion of college coursework and degrees in early childhood  
23 education and child or youth development.

24 (2) Allocate sufficient funds to continue and strengthen registered apprenticeships for early  
25 educators that support attainment of national credentials, college coursework and degrees while  
26 providing opportunities to develop high-quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by  
27 master early educators.

28 (3) Allocate sufficient funds of at least one million dollars (\$1,000,000) per year to  
29 continue the Child Care WAGE\$ program, a national model designed to improve compensation,  
30 education, and retention of early educators by providing education-based salary supplements to  
31 low-paid center-based educators, directors, and family childcare providers working with children  
32 in licensed early childhood programs.

1 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

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RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR WORKFORCE ACT

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1           This act would direct the department of human services and the department of education  
2 to work collaboratively to sustain and strengthen existing workforce development and  
3 compensation programs for educators working in licensed child care and early learning programs  
4 statewide and would allocate at least \$1,000,000 to continue the Child Care WAGES model to help  
5 strengthen and sustain the child care workforce

6           This act would take effect upon passage.

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