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LC004459
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
ACT

Introduced By: Senators Acosta, DiMario, Gallo, Murray, Mack, and McKenney

Date Introduced: January 23, 2026

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 16-87-3 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-87 entitled "Rhode Island
2 Prekindergarten Education Act" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **16-87-3. ~~Planning phase for a prekindergarten program~~ Rhode Island**
4 **prekindergarten program.**

5 (a) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education (~~"the~~
6 ~~department"~~) shall ~~begin planning an initial, pilot~~ maintain a prekindergarten program that meets
7 high quality standards, builds on the existing early childhood education infrastructure in the state
8 (including child care, Head Start and public schools) and serves children ages three (3) and four (4)
9 ~~who reside in communities with concentrations of low performing schools. This planning phase~~
10 ~~will develop specific goals to expand the pilot prekindergarten program over time and will also~~
11 ~~identify opportunities to strengthen care and learning programs for infants and toddlers~~ years.

12 (b) ~~During this planning phase,~~ Annually, the ~~Rhode Island~~ department of ~~elementary and~~
13 ~~secondary education will~~ shall quantify the resources needed to achieve and maintain high quality
14 standards in prekindergarten programs and identify incentives and supports to develop a qualified
15 early education workforce, including opportunities for experienced early childhood educators and
16 paraprofessionals to acquire college degrees and earn early childhood teacher certification.

17 (c) ~~The Rhode Island~~ Annually, the department ~~of elementary and secondary education will~~
18 ~~begin to develop plans to~~ shall collect and analyze data regarding the impact of the ~~pilot state~~

prekindergarten program on participating children's school readiness and school achievement.

(d) The department shall conduct a lottery to determine enrollment in the state prekindergarten program, pursuant to § 16-87-3.1.

SECTION 2. Chapter 16-87 of the General Laws entitled "Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following sections:

16-87-3.1. Lottery for the Rhode Island prekindergarten program.

(a) As used in this section and § 16-87-3.2, the following words shall have the following meanings:

(1) "Participating in the state prekindergarten program" means a municipality that receives funding from the state to create or maintain slots in a classroom for three (3) or four (4) year-olds.

(2) "Preferred program" means a program(s) selected by the family of a potential prekindergarten student when applying to enter the prekindergarten lottery. Families shall not be permitted to identify their preferred program(s) from a list of prekindergarten programs operating in any municipality participating in the state prekindergarten program.

(3) "Siblings" means students who are related by blood, marriage, or co-residence of their parents.

(4) "Students who are economically disadvantaged" means students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

(b) To be eligible for the lottery, a student shall be:

(1) A resident of a community participating in the state prekindergarten program; and

(2) Four (4) years of age by September 1 of the lottery year.

(c) The prekindergarten lottery shall be conducted to consider the following:

(1) A family's preferred program;

(2) Siblings that are already enrolled in a particular prekindergarten program; and

(3) The economic demographics of the municipality in which the prekindergarten program operates.

(d) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall promulgate rules and regulations regarding the operation of the lottery for state-funded prekindergarten seats pursuant to this section.

16-87-3.2. Enrollment at Rhode Island prekindergarten programs.

(a) Effective July 1, 2026, any prekindergarten program (a "program") located in any municipality participating in the state prekindergarten program may accept students into their program who are not residents of the municipality in which the program operates; provided that, all of the following conditions are present:

- 1 (1) The program has open slots available;
2 (2) The student is otherwise eligible for the prekindergarten program; and
3 (3) The student is selected by the prekindergarten lottery.
4 (b) The acceptance of students into a program who are not residents of the municipality in
5 which the program operates shall not, in and of itself, cause a loss or reduction in state or local
6 education aid to the program.
7 (c) No student shall be excluded from a prekindergarten program who has a sibling enrolled
8 in that prekindergarten program based on the fact that the student lives in a different municipality.
9 (d) The Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education shall promulgate
10 rules and regulations regarding the enrollment at state-funded prekindergarten seats pursuant to this
11 section.

12 SECTION 3. 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 PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
ACT

- 1 This act would allow municipalities participating in the state prekindergarten program to
- 2 accept students from outside the municipality under certain conditions and establish a lottery for
- 3 enrollment in the program.
- 4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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