

PRESS RELEASE

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Advocates and Families Launch Right from the Start Campaign to Ensure All Rhode Island Children Get Off to the Right Start in Life

Campaign advocates for package of early childhood education and parent friendly legislation

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Today in the State Room of the Rhode Island State House, a group of advocates and families came together to launch the Right from the Start campaign, a package of legislation and state budget investments (see below) designed to ensure that all Rhode Island children get off to the right start in life.

“Every Rhode Island child, regardless of their zip code or their parent’s race, ethnicity, or income deserves to get off to the right start in life,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “A start where all mothers have healthy births with a core focus on racial disparities, where new parents have the precious time needed to bond with their babies, and equitable access to affordable, high quality child care, Pre-K, and early learning options are available across Rhode Island in bright, beautiful facilities. As a state, we’ve made tremendous strides in these areas, but there’s much more to do to ensure that all of our kids get off to the right start. That’s what the Right from the Start agenda is all about and why we’ll be working with our elected leaders to pass this critical package of legislation and investments.”

Governor Gina M. Raimondo called for the passage of her early childhood budget priorities, specifically her proposals to expand public pre-K seats by 50% next year, put on the ballot a \$15 million bond to revitalize Rhode Island’s early learning facilities, and fully fund the Family Home Visiting program. “This is not a fight that can wait,” said Governor Gina M. Raimondo. “Any time we delay measures to improve the lives of Rhode Island families, more children are left behind. I look forward to working together to make Rhode Island the best place in America for a child to grow up.”

“I hear from my constituents all the time about how difficult it is to find affordable child care and to balance the needs of work while also finding quality time to spend with their young

children,” said Pawtucket State Senator Sandra Cano. “As a new mom, I understand this struggle firsthand and that’s why I support the Right from the Start agenda including expanding Rhode Island’s paid family leave program, covering community-based doula services, increasing access to quality, affordable child care and Pre-K, and investing in our early childhood educators.”

“As a working father of three young children, I understand the struggle of balancing work and family, and know that many Rhode Island families face the same challenges,” said Providence resident Andrew Poyant. “That’s why it’s so important to have a set of supports including paid family leave and access to affordable, quality child care that help both young parents and kids to thrive. The Right from the Start agenda just makes sense for families, for our kids, and for our state’s future, and that’s why I urge our state lawmakers to support these important investments.”

“Our youngest learners are literally the future of our state, and it is critical that we invest in their success,” said Providence State Representative Grace Diaz. “We’ve made great strides in increasing access to high quality child care and Pre-K, but much more needs to be done to ensure that all Rhode Island kids and families can take advantage of these critical early learning resources. That’s why I support the Right from the Start agenda and why I’m proud to sponsor legislation to further expand quality child care options and invest in our early childhood educators.”

“Rhode Island has been a leader in providing workers with job protected paid leave since 2014,” said Rachel Flum, Executive Director of the Economic Progress Institute of Rhode Island. “However, families often need more than the current four weeks provided to care for a new baby or seriously ill family member, and many lower income Rhode Islander are unable to take advantage of this time because the amount families receive while on leave is not enough. That’s why we support the Right from the Start agenda and legislation to improve the paid leave program by increasing the amount of time and benefits available. This will help families better balance work and family obligations - improving health outcomes for all.”

“Forty-five percent of young children in Rhode Island are people of color, most of whom are Latinos, yet too many of our families are struggling to make ends meet and give their kids the right start they deserve so they can thrive,” said Marcela Betancour, Executive Director of the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University. “Investing in young learners and their families is essential to our state’s future. From increasing access to doula services for new moms – especially Black mothers who disproportionately are impacted by maternal and infant mortality, to increasing access to affordable, high quality childcare and Pre-K, to investing in affordable housing and early learning facilities, the Latino Policy Institute strongly supports the Right from the Start agenda.”

About the Right from the Start Campaign

Right from the Start is a legislative and state budget campaign to advance policies for young children and their families in Rhode Island. While Rhode Island has much to offer, the reality is

too many families struggle to support their young children during the critical early years of brain development. Rhode Island needs sustainable state funding and must raise additional state revenue for programs and policies that support families and their children from prenatal to Pre-K. These investments will pay dividends for our children's success and our state's economy for years to come. RightFromTheStartRI.org - Facebook: [@RightFromTheStartRI](https://www.facebook.com/RightFromTheStartRI) - Twitter: [@RightStartRI](https://twitter.com/RightStartRI)

Right from the Start Campaign Steering Committee: *Beautiful Beginnings, Economic Progress Institute, Latino Policy Institute, Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.*

Right From the Start Legislative and Budget Agenda

Paid Family Leave

Rhode Island parents and their babies need dedicated time together after birth or adoption to develop close, nurturing relationships during the early months of brain development. Our state's paid family leave policy is a step in the right direction, but the low wage replacement rates mean that many of the families that need it the most are not being reached. We need to improve Rhode Island's paid family leave policy so parents can take the time they need to set the foundation for their child's healthy development while ensuring they can make ends meet.

Community-Based Doula Services

Racial discrimination and implicit bias result in unequal treatment of Black women in the medical system and drive health inequity. In Rhode Island, Black women are 42% more likely to experience a severe complication at delivery than White women. The infant mortality rate for Black infants in Rhode Island is three times that of White infants. A key strategy to address this issue is making doula services eligible for reimbursement through Medicaid and private insurance and investing in building, supporting, and sustaining the doula workforce and infrastructure in the state. These services and investments should be targeted toward communities most impacted by these disparities.

Family Home Visiting Prevention Program

Parenting is hard and families can use extra help nurturing their babies and setting them up for a healthy life. Rhode Island has a strong network of voluntary, evidence-based home visiting prevention programs that help guide parents during these critical early years when a child's brain is rapidly developing and laying the foundation for future learning, health, and behavior. We need to invest \$1.3 million in state and federal funding to sustain these programs that are proven to help build more strong, healthy families today and save costs over time.

Child Care Assistance Program

Families need access to affordable, high-quality child care so parents can work and their children can thrive through nurturing relationships with educators who provide enriching early learning experiences. But the rates for Rhode Island's Child Care Assistance Program do not meet federal standards and only 10% of children are in high-quality programs. Low state rates

impact the quality of care available to all families. An investment of \$7.5 million in state and federal funding will ensure more families can access high-quality child care that provides a strong foundation for children to thrive.

Early Educator Workforce Development

High-quality early childhood programs have effective educators who know how to work with children and families to support young children’s rapid brain development. However, many early educators earn wages that are at the bottom of the occupational ladder (\$12/hour for child care teachers). Effective professionals are leaving the field for better paying jobs. Rhode Island needs to establish state goals and find solutions that will attract and retain skilled, qualified, diverse educators in essential programs to ensure children get a strong start in school and life and maintain Rhode Island’s healthy economy today and tomorrow.

Pre-K Expansion

Rhode Island Pre-K is a high-quality program delivered by public schools, Head Start agencies, and child care programs that produces learning gains and helps to close achievement gaps. But too many 4-year-olds in our state don’t have access to this critical opportunity for healthy development. An investment of \$7.5 million in state and federal funding will allow more children to attend Pre-K across the state and when combined with increased investments in programs for children from birth through age 3, will ensure more children start kindergarten ready to succeed.

Housing/Early Learning Facilities Bond

Housing and child care are the two biggest costs for families with young children. Affordable housing options are very limited across the state and concentrated in only a few communities. Child care and early learning facilities are aging, have inadequate resources to make improvements, and have very limited resources to expand. More than half of the buildings that house early learning programs in Rhode Island are in poor condition. Passing an affordable housing bond proposal that includes \$15 million to renovate and expand early learning facilities will help address two essential needs of young families.

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