



Testimony Re: S-0324 Home Visiting System Components

Senate Health & Human Services Committee

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Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports Senate Bill 0324. This bill would build on the *2016 Rhode Island Family Home Visiting Act* by requiring the Rhode Island Department of Health to prepare an annual estimate of the number of children who face significant risk factors known to impair child development and a plan to gradually expand access to evidence-based family home visiting programs to serve all vulnerable families. The bill would also establish two categories of families that should be offered the opportunity to participate in these voluntary programs: 1) pregnant and parenting teens, and 2) families with a history of involvement in the child welfare system (either as a parent or as a child).

Most states use a combination of state and federal funding to provide family home visiting services to vulnerable families. Even before the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010 establishing new federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funding, 31 states were investing state resources to provide home visiting services. Currently, in addition to MIECHV funding, states use a variety of federal funding sources to support home visiting programs for vulnerable families, including TANF, Early Head Start, Title I education funding, Title V Maternal and Child Health funding, and Medicaid.

Rhode Island has made substantial progress in reducing teen births but there are approximately 450-500 babies born to teen mothers (under age 20) every year. There are also approximately 200 babies born to women with a history of involvement in the child welfare system (either as parents or as children raised in foster care). We need to ensure that these families receive the support they need to be successful by providing effective, evidence-based family home visiting programs that improve outcomes for both generations (the child and the parents).

Children born to teen parents are at increased risk for preterm delivery, low birthweight, infant mortality, child maltreatment and placement in foster care. They score lower on measures of school readiness and are more likely to repeat a grade, and to drop out of high school. Sons of teen mothers are twice as likely to spend time in prison and daughters of teen mothers are three times more likely to become teen mothers themselves.

Teen parenting is also a threat to the development and success of the mother. Teen mothers have difficulty finishing high school and college. Only 38% of girls who give birth before age 18 have a high school diploma by age 22 (compared with 89% of girls who have not given birth). Less than 2% of teen mothers finish college by age 30.

Teens in foster care are much more likely than their peers to get pregnant and have a baby. Mothers involved with the child welfare system face a unique set of challenges that further complicates teen parenthood. Research suggests that children who have been victims of maltreatment are at higher risk of becoming perpetrators of maltreatment when they become parents.

Currently the state has 4 evidence-based family home visiting programs providing services statewide. Additional evidence-based models may be identified in the future.

- **Early Head Start** serves 357 Rhode Island families through home visiting. The program improves parenting practices and maternal education and employment and produces significant cognitive, language, and social-emotional gains in participating children.
- **Nurse-Family Partnership** serves 158 Rhode Island families. The program has been studied scientifically and demonstrates numerous positive benefits for children and families, including improved prenatal health of mothers, fewer childhood injuries, fewer subsequent pregnancies, increased intervals between births, increased maternal employment and improved school readiness.
- **Healthy Families America** serves almost 600 Rhode Island families. HFA has also been studied extensively with 15 evaluations in 12 states showing the program reduces child maltreatment, improves parent-child interaction, improves school readiness, decreases a family's dependence on welfare/TANF and other social services, and increases immunization rates and use of primary health care.
- **Parents as Teachers** serves 300 Rhode Island families. The program is designed to improve parents' knowledge of early childhood development and to help them become their child's first and most influential teacher. Research studies have shown that the program improves parenting practices and children's school readiness.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in establishing the Rhode Island Family Home Visiting Act and we urge your support for this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

