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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR INVESTMENT ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Casimiro, Noret, Donovan, Vella-Wilkinson, Shallcross
Smith, Alzate, Diaz, Kazarian, Ruggiero, and Caldwell

Date Introduced: February 02, 2022

Referred To: House Finance

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 2020 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for
15 a child care teacher in Rhode Island was twelve dollars and eleven cents (\$12.11) per hour and the
16 median wage for a preschool teacher in Rhode Island was fourteen dollars and thirty-two cents
17 (\$14.32) per hour, well below the state median wage of twenty-two dollars and seventy-seven cents
18 (\$22.77) per hour and significantly below the level of kindergarten teachers who had an average
19 annual salary of seventy-nine thousand one hundred fifty dollars (\$79,150). Rhode Island state
20 agency data show that median wages for Early Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with
21 Disabilities Education Act) specialists and family home visitors are significantly below Rhode
22 Island median wages for similarly qualified individuals.

23 (7) By enacting this chapter, the general assembly acknowledges the need to develop and
24 implement strategies to improve the compensation of early educators in order that programs can
25 attract, develop, and retain effective staff to care for and educate young children and provide
26 family-focused services.

27 **16-112-3. Establishment of a target wage scale.**

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

33 (b) The target wage scale shall be developed to apply to educators working in child care
34 centers, family child care homes, Rhode Island Pre-K classrooms, family home visiting programs,

1 and Early Intervention (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) programs. The
2 cross-departmental target wage scale shall promote parity with kindergarten through grade twelve
3 (K-12) public school teachers for individuals with similar credentials.

4 (c) In developing this cross-departmental target wage scale, the children's cabinet may
5 consider the findings and recommendations provided in the 2019 Moving the Needle on
6 Compensation Task Force's report "Improving the Compensation and Retention of Effective
7 Infant/Toddler Educators in Rhode Island."

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

9 (a) Once the target wage scale has been established, the children's cabinet shall design
10 strategies and estimate the cost to close the gap between current wages and the cross-departmental
11 target wage scale, including parity with public school teaching staff or individuals with similar
12 credentials. In developing the plan, the following components shall be considered:

13 (1) Continuation and expansion of the existing statewide, comprehensive, research-based
14 early childhood workforce development scholarship program established under § 16-87-4 to
15 include stronger and ongoing support for compensation, such as implementation of wage
16 supplements or regular stipends for early educators to lift annual income to meet or exceed the
17 levels in the target wage scale. Consideration shall be given to the Infant/Toddler Educator
18 Education and Retention Awards demonstration program recommended by the Moving the Needle
19 on Compensation's Task Force.

20 (2) Proposals to increase rates paid to early childhood programs that are adequate to enable
21 programs to pay early educators wages that meet or exceed the levels in the cross-departmental
22 target wage scale.

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

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

31 **16-112-5. Reporting.**

32 The children's cabinet shall report back to the governor and general assembly on or before
33 December 1, 2022 with a cross-departmental target wage scale and initial cost estimates for public
34 funding to close the wage gaps for early 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 an updated target wage scale for early educators working in
25 child care, Rhode Island Pre-K, family home visiting, and Early Intervention (Part C of the
26 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) programs that aligns with compensation of similarly
27 qualified kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) educators. This updated target wage scale shall
28 also include the design and oversee implementation of a strategic plan to close the gap between
29 current wages and the target wage scale, including, but not limited to, the attainment of parity with
30 similarly qualified public school teaching staff, pursuant to the provisions of chapter 112 of title
31 16.

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

34 CHAPTER 6.7

1 CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATOR REGISTRY

2 **40-6.7-1. Child care and early educator registry.**

3 (a) On or before December 1, 2022, the department of human services shall implement a
4 child care and early educator registry that meets the recommended guidelines of the National
5 Workforce Registry Alliance, and includes information about staff who work directly with children
6 in all licensed child care centers and family child care homes in the state. The registry shall be
7 designed to support communication of important information and opportunities, including training
8 opportunities and opportunities to receive a wage supplement, directly to front-line child care and
9 early educators. The registry shall also be designed to help the state gather and maintain information
10 about the demographics and annual turnover of child care educators by key factors including
11 educational qualifications and age category of children they teach.

12 (b) Annually, beginning on or before March 31, 2023, the department of human services
13 shall produce an annual report on the status of the child care educator registry and the characteristics
14 of the child care workforce, including demographic information, qualifications, and turnover data.
15 The report shall be shared with the general assembly, the children’s cabinet, all licensed child care
16 centers and family child care homes, individuals participating in the registry, and posted on the
17 department’s website for the general public.

18 (c) On or before December 1, 2022, the department of human services shall design and
19 begin implementation of a five million dollars (\$5,000,000) pilot program to provide monthly wage
20 supplements for child care educators. The program shall be designed to close the gap between the
21 actual wages of the child care educators and the target wages according to the cross-departmental
22 target wage scale for early educators developed by the children’s cabinet. The department shall
23 consider the design of the Infant/Toddler Educator Education and Retention Awards demonstration
24 program recommended in 2019 by the Moving the Needle on Compensation's Task Force. The pilot
25 shall include child care educators who work in both licensed child care centers and family child
26 care homes and shall be available statewide, with priority given to child care educators who work
27 with infants and toddlers and children enrolled in the child care assistance program.

28 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 establish the Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act to develop and
2 implement strategies to improve the compensation of early childhood educators. This act would
3 also direct the children’s cabinet to work with other state departments to establish goals to improve
4 compensation for early childhood educators, which would include a target wage scale for early
5 childhood educators aligned with the educator’s education level and demonstrated competence in
6 the field. This act would also direct the department of human services to implement a child care
7 and early educator registry to include information about staff who work directly with children in
8 all licensed child care centers and similar placements in the state.

9 This act would take effect upon passage.

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