

**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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**Testimony Re:** H-7225, RI Department of Health  
FY25 Budget – Family Home Visiting  
**House Finance Committee**  
**March 21, 2024**  
**Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst**



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that help babies and young children get off to the right start.

**Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly urge the RI Department of Health to allocate sufficient funds to sustain the First Connections program** which is scheduled to receive a Medicaid rate cut on July 1, 2024 if the Governor’s recommended budget is passed and to allocate sufficient state funds required as a federal match to allow the Department of Health to draw down the new federal funding available to strengthen and expand evidence-based Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) services.

#### **First Connections Short-Term Newborn Home Visiting:**

After 22 years without a Medicaid rate increase, the First Connections program received a one-year temporary Medicaid rate increase in FY23 which was extended through FY24. **The Governor’s FY25 budget EOHHS recommendation will cut rates for the First Connections program, by reducing the rate increase to only one-third of what they have been receiving.**

First Connections has been providing nurse-led home visiting services statewide since at least the 1950s. Since the 1980s, it has served as the state’s Child Find program for Early Intervention required under Part C of the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*.

Currently delivered by four non-profit agencies, First Connections is designed to identify babies’ and families’ needs as early as possible and connect them with services to address those needs, including mental health services, WIC, help with affordable housing, Early Intervention, and comprehensive evidence-based family home visiting programs.

First Connections is Rhode Island’s frontline home visiting service for families with newborns statewide. **Since 2015, the number of families receiving a First Connections visit has dropped by 23% from 3,800 families to 2,900 families.**

**Evidence-Based Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) services.**

Since 2010, the Rhode Island Department of Health has been receiving federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds to build and sustain family home visiting infrastructure to implement evidence-based models that provide long-term comprehensive services designed to help the whole family. Rhode Island currently receives \$8.5 million/year in federal MIECHV funds to implement three evidence-based models: Healthy Families America, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers. These programs follow rigorous research models to deliver services that produce lasting improved outcomes for children and families including:

- Significant reductions in child maltreatment, language delays, and emergency room visits for accidents.
- Significant improvements in school readiness, maternal mental health, parental education, and parental employment.

**Just since 2021, the number of families enrolled in an Evidence-Based Home Visiting Program has dropped by 24% from 1,317 to 1,000 families.**

Federal reauthorization of MIECHV funds occurred in December 2022 and will provide level funding for 5 years. Newly authorized funds to strengthen and expand services require a 25% state match to be phased in to draw down funds. **A January 2024 national survey of 40 states recently found that Rhode Island is one of only two states (North Dakota is the other) that does not have any state general funds allocated for the new MIECVH match.**

**Right now (application is due May 29, 2024) there is a federal funding opportunity open to draw down the new MIECHV funds and the Department of Health is not able to apply for this funding until \$242,000 of state general revenue is allocated that would enable them to bring in another \$762,000 in funds – totaling \$968,000** that would go immediately to help strengthen and expand evidence-based family home visiting programs that we know improve short-term and long-term outcomes for Rhode Island’s pregnant and parenting families with babies and young children.

**Estimated MIECHV matching funds for future years is below:**

<b>Federal Fiscal Year</b>	<b>State Match Required</b>	<b>Federal Funding Available with Match</b>	<b>Total New Funding</b>
<b>FFY25</b>	<b>\$356,000</b>	<b>\$1,080,000</b>	<b>\$1.4 million</b>
FFY26	\$535,000	\$1,620,000	\$2.2 million
FFY27	\$787,000	\$2,384,000	\$3.2 million

We understand the DOH is trying to find funding so they can apply for the current funding opportunity. We urge the General Assembly to allocate sufficient funds in the SFY25 budget and beyond to allow the state to draw down the full federal funding available.

## Save First Connections & Family Home Visiting

[H-7899](#) (Giraldo) & [S-2360](#) (Valverde)

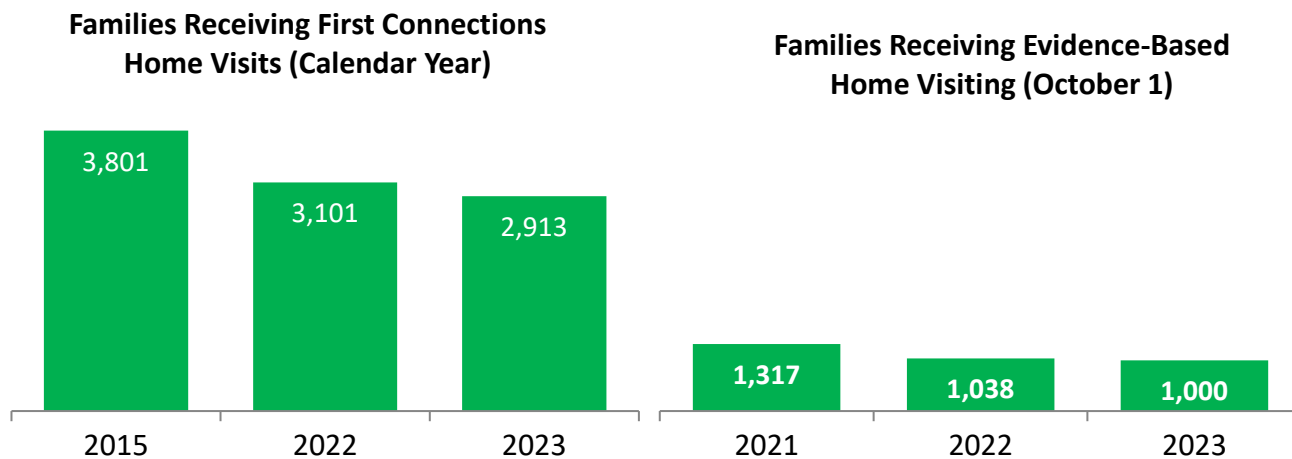


**Right** from the  
**Start**

**First Connections is Rhode Island's frontline home visiting service for families with newborns statewide.** Currently delivered by four non-profit agencies, it is designed to identify babies' and families' needs as early as possible and connect them with services to address those needs, including mental health services, WIC, help with affordable housing, Early Intervention, and comprehensive evidence-based family home visiting programs.

**Rhode Island's Evidence-Based Family Home Visiting programs** (Early Head Start, Healthy Families, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers) **provide long-term, comprehensive services designed to help the whole family.** These programs follow rigorous research models that produce lasting improved outcomes for children and families including significant reductions in child maltreatment, language delays, and emergency room visits for accidents; and improvements in school readiness, maternal mental health, and parental education and employment.

### Fewer Rhode Island Babies and Families Are Getting the Help They Need



Since 2015, the number of families served by First Connections has dropped by 23%. Since 2021, the number of families served by a comprehensive, evidence-based program has dropped by 24%.

#### The First Connections & Family Home Visiting 2024 bill will:

- 1. Make the long-needed (22 years!) rate increase permanent for the Rhode Island First Connections newborn home visiting program.** Prior to the temporary rate increase, First Connections programs had **an average operating loss of \$136.70 per visit**, causing a significant financial and staffing crisis that limits services for children and families.
- 2. Require the development of a plan to sustain and expand voluntary family home visiting services**, including meeting the **new state funding match requirements** for the federal Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting funds to draw down new federal funds so that high-quality programs are offered to all families who could benefit.

City/Town	# Received First Connections Visit in 2023	# Enrolled in Evidence-Based Home Visiting on October 1, 2023
Barrington	10	7
Bristol	21	5
Burrillville	26	1
Central Falls	60	88
Charlestown	12	4
Coventry	78	26
Cranston	246	92
Cumberland	53	7
East Greenwich	21	3
East Providence	40	18
Exeter	11	2
Foster	9	1
Glocester	8	1
Hopkinton	16	6
Jamestown	5	1
Johnston	45	7
Lincoln	35	9
Little Compton	1	1
Middletown	33	9
Narragansett	18	3
New Shoreham	6	1
Newport	29	8
North Kingstown	49	6
North Providence	61	9
North Smithfield	18	3
Pawtucket	137	125
Portsmouth	15	3
Providence	1,188	365
Richmond	12	2
Scituate	15	0
Smithfield	15	2
South Kingstown	51	6
Tiverton	12	10
Warren	9	4
Warwick	178	40
West Greenwich	13	1
West Warwick	93	23
Westerly	59	33
Woonsocket	157	66
<i>Missing Residence</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>2,913</i>	<i>1,000</i>