

RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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**Testimony Re: H-7334 Re: Maternal and Child
Health Services for Children with Special Health
Care Needs (Early Intervention)
House Finance Committee
May 1, 2024
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst**

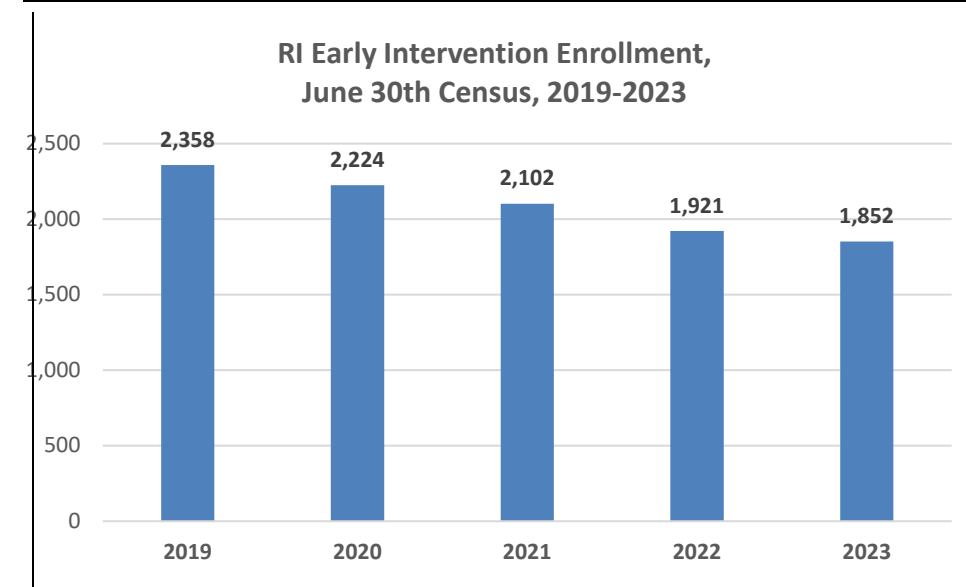
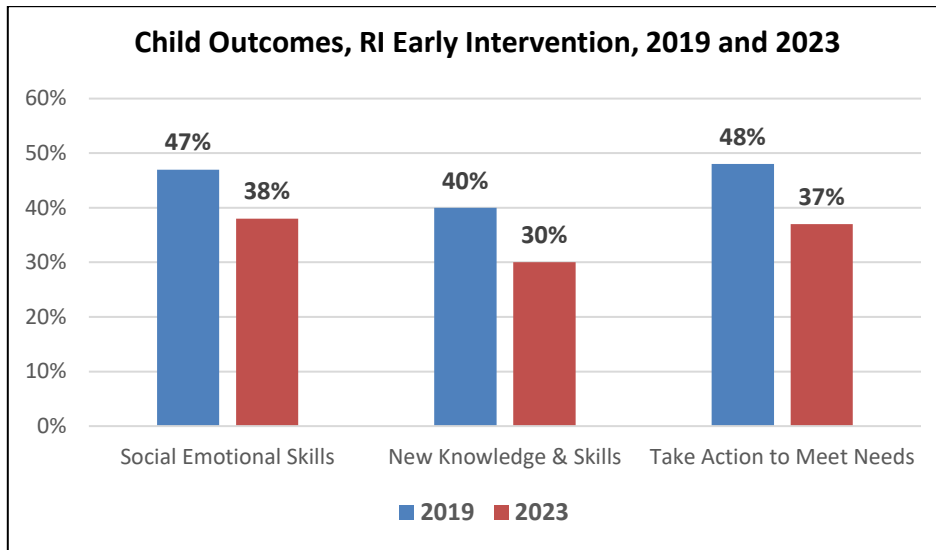


Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that help babies and young children get off to the right start.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support Representative Megan Cotter's bill, H-7334, which **proposes a 25% increase in the Medicaid to fully staff Early Intervention programs so programs can serve all children who need these services. This bill also establishes an annual Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) to keep up with rising costs.** Lastly, the bill updates the Early Intervention statute to clarify that EOHHS is responsible for Early Intervention.

Rhode Island's Early Intervention program provides special education services to infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or disabilities. Early Intervention is required under the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. Researchers have found that about one-third of infants and toddlers who received high-quality Early Intervention services no longer had a developmental delay, disability, or special education need in kindergarten.

Rhode Island's Early Intervention program has been experiencing a major financial and staffing crisis that is limiting access to these important services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities. Medicaid rates for Rhode Island Early Intervention programs were frozen from 2002-2009 when they were then cut by 3%. Rates were frozen at the reduced amount from 2009 until the General Assembly enacted a 45% rate increase and allocated temporary *ARPA* funding to Early Intervention in 2022. In November 2021, a statewide waiting list for Early Intervention was established. **As of February 2024, there were 623 infants and toddlers who had been waiting more than 45 days for services.**



- The number of children receiving Early Intervention services in Rhode Island has **fallen by 21% since 2019**.
- The percentage of children enrolled in Early Intervention who demonstrate improved skills and knowledge has **dropped by about 10 percentage points since 2019**, most likely due to continued service delays and disruptions caused by inadequate staffing.
- *ARPA* funding for Early Intervention has ended.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks Rep. Cotter for her leadership in sponsoring this bill to end waiting lists for Early Intervention and address staffing shortages, which we know will help thousands of babies and young children statewide. We urge you to pass this legislation so babies and toddlers receive the services they need to address developmental delays. Providing these services will help ensure that fewer children need special education services when they are older, saving funds down the road, and ensuring that children are ready for success.

Early Intervention Legislation 2024

Governor's FY25 Budget Proposal Article 9, Section 5

[H-7334](#) (Cotter) & [S-2359](#) (Valverde)

[H-7123](#) (Diaz) & [S-2344](#) (DiMario)



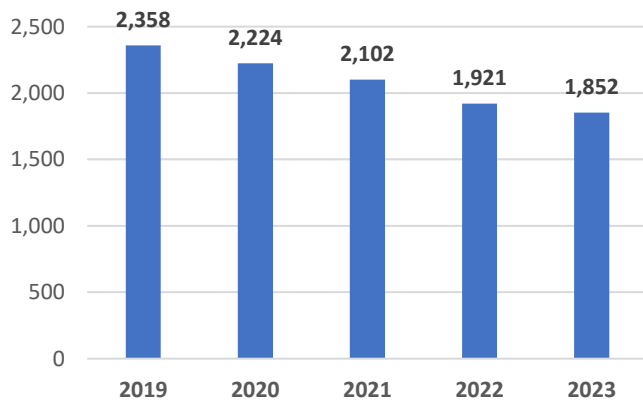
Right from the
Start

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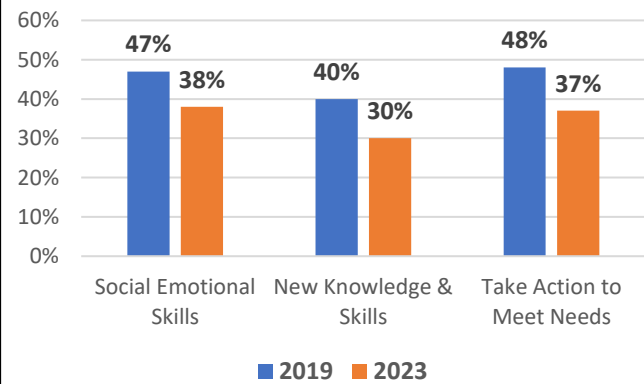
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RI Early Intervention Enrollment,
June 30th Census, 2019-2023



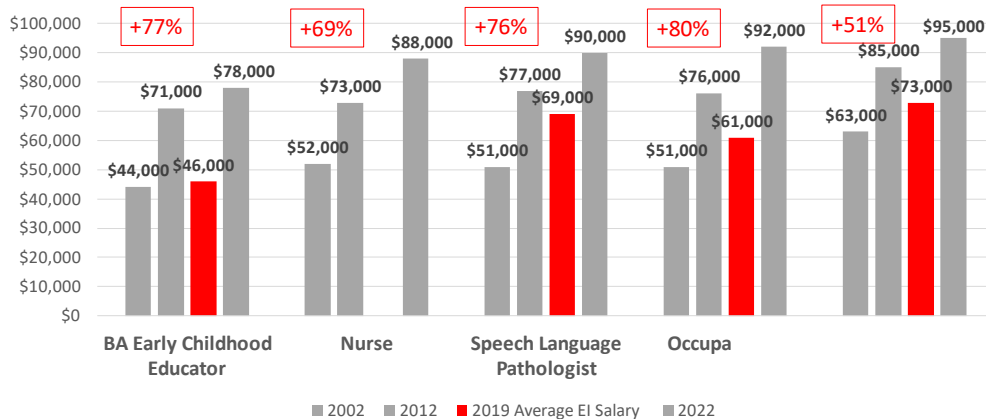
Child Outcomes, RI Early Intervention,
2019 and 2023



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Average Annual Wage of Relevant Professions for Early Intervention, Rhode Island



Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics for RI in May 2002, 2012, 2022. Kindergarten teacher wage estimates were used for BA Early Childhood Educator. EI average wages are from EOHHS.

Since 2002, average salaries have increased by 50 to 80% for many professions needed to deliver Early Intervention services. Wages for these professions continue to rise and staff shortages continue. **In November of 2023, Early Intervention agencies reported 42 staff vacancies including 17 therapists (PT, OT, or SLP) and 19 Service Coordinators (usually have a BA in Early Childhood Education).**

Three Early Intervention legislative and budget proposals for 2024:

- 1) **Governor McKee's FY25 budget proposal includes a 13% to 18% Medicaid rate increase for Early Intervention, 100% of the OHIC recommended rate increase.**
- 2) **Rep. Cotter's and Sen. Valverde's bills (H-7334 and S-2359) propose a 25% Medicaid rate increase and an annual Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA).** The bill also updates the Early Intervention statute to clarify that EOHHS is responsible for Early Intervention.
- 3) **Rep. Diaz's and Sen. DiMario's bills (H-7123 and S-2344) propose to add Early Intervention frontline staff to the Child Care for Child Care Educators program,** providing a strong incentive and support for parents of young children to work in Early Intervention.

In addition, Rep. Carson and Sen. Valverde have introduced a bill to establish an Early Childhood IDEA Task Force (H-7438 and S-2512) to develop a financing and staffing plan for a coherent system of educational and developmental services for babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities, from birth up to kindergarten entry (across both Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education).

Note: Under state law, private insurance rates must match or exceed state Medicaid rates for Early Intervention. About 60% of children enrolled in Early Intervention have Medicaid and 40% have private insurance coverage. **Any increase in Medicaid rates triggers an increase in funding for privately insured children too.**