

**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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**Testimony Re:** H-7899 The Rhode Island Family Home Visiting Act (First Connections)  
**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 Joshua Giraldo's bill, H-7899**, which makes the temporary, one-year rate increase for the First Connections program permanent, and requires the development of a plan to sustain and expand voluntary family home visiting services.

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

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.

**Prior to the 2022 temporary rate increase that was included in the state budget, First Connections had not received a rate increase in 22 years!** 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. In 2022, South County Home Health terminated its contract with the state to deliver First Connections.

Rhode Island's First Connections program should be expanded to become a voluntary family home visiting program offered to all families with newborns. **Both Oregon and New Jersey have enacted legislation and have begun phasing in universal home visiting.**

**In addition to First Connections, Rhode Island’s Evidence-Based Family Home Visiting programs (Healthy Families, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers) provide long-term (2 or more years), comprehensive services designed to help the whole family.** 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%**

Rhode Island relies almost entirely on federal grants to deliver these evidence-based family home visiting services through direct Early Head Start contracts with agencies and through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) formula grants to the RI Department of Health. **Federal reauthorization of MIECHV funds occurred in December 2022 and will now require a 25% state match to be phased in to draw down funds. Rhode Island currently spends \$0 state funds on home visiting.**

**Additional funds to sustain, strengthen, and expand are available to states based on a 25% match. Rhode Island is one of only two states that does not have any state general funds allocated to draw down additional federal funding (as of January 2024).**

Federal Fiscal Year	State Match Required	Federal Funding Available with Match	Total New Funding
FFY2024 (application due May 29, 2024)	\$242,000	\$762,000	\$968,000
FFY2025	\$356,000	\$1,080,000	\$1.4 million
FFY2026	\$535,000	\$1,620,000	\$2.2 million
FFY2027	\$787,000	\$2,384,000	\$3.2 million

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks Representative Giraldo for his leadership in sponsoring this bill to sustain and strengthen Rhode Island’s family home visiting system which we know helps thousands of babies and young children statewide.**

## Save First Connections & Family Home Visiting

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

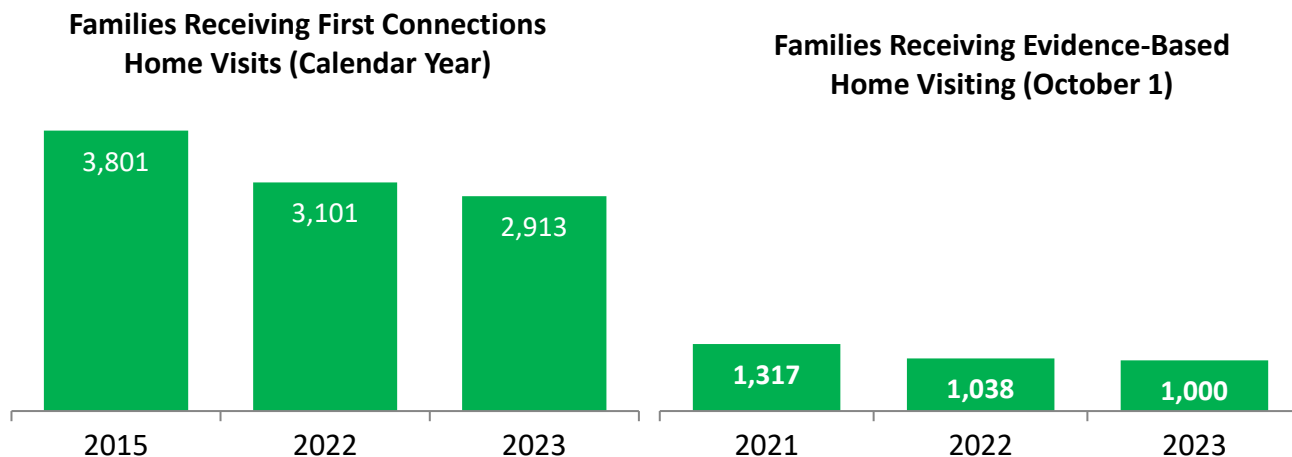


**Right** from the  
**Start**

**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.

<b>City/Town</b>	<b># Received First Connections Visit in 2023</b>	<b># Enrolled in Evidence-Based Home Visiting on October 1, 2023</b>
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>