

*Vision: All RI children, regardless of circumstance, should have access to high quality early learning opportunities.*

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## Executive Summary

In January 2018, the Department of Human Services convened a group of key stakeholders in early childhood education to solicit recommendations for strengthening Rhode Island's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS.) A series of four meetings were held and key recommendations were shared with the Department of Human Services (the Department) in May 2018. The Department is grateful to those who participated in the Think Tank sessions (see Appendix A for a list of participants.)

As a follow-up to the Think Tank's work, the Department of Human Services partnered with the following entities to review the recommendations set forth by the Think Tank to present responsible, data-driven decisions to strengthen the QRIS framework to best support the early learning workforce to improve quality of child care services for Rhode Island children and families.

- RIAEYC and BrightStars
- Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE)
- Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)
- The Center for Early Learning Professionals (CELP)
- Ready 2 Learn Providence (R2LP)
- Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI)
- Rhode Island College (RIC)
- The Genesis Center
- Head Start Collaboration Director
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
- SEIU 1199

All recommendations outlined in the Think Tank's report were considered, and the following changes will be made to the QRIS framework. Timelines associated with each action-item are identified below. The Department's commitment to continuous quality improvement across the state's early childhood system will not be limited to these recommendations. The Department welcomes ongoing dialogue with our stakeholder community throughout the next year.

The 24 recommendations in this report are organized around 4 key strategy areas:

- Program Observation Tools
- Brightstars' Framework
- DHS & DCYF Licensing Alignment
- Workforce Development & Credentialing

## Section 1: Program Assessment Tools

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### Think Tank Recommendation 1:

DHS reviews the current program observation tools in use (ERS and CLASS Pre-K) across all programs, collaboratively with BrightStars and RIDE staff, to determine the versions and cut scores that will be used and align the tools across the two agencies and their programs to allow shared, coordinated use of scores.

**DHS Action:** DHS and BrightStars met biweekly for two months to review the internal data associated with the ERS assessment tools for providers. This analysis showed, among other things, that

- **To date, Family Child Care Providers have engaged broadly in FCCRS trainings; however, they have not received an on-site FCCRS assessment:** Only 7 family child care providers have received an on-site FCCRS assessment.
- **Overall, providers who have received an on-site ERS evaluation have scored well:** The average ERS score for all providers who have received an ERS assessment is 4.56.

Based on the Think Tank recommendation and accompanying analysis, the following four actions will be taken:

- **Transference of ERS Trainings from BrightStars to CELP and R2LP will increase the state's capacity to support providers in understanding the assessment tool used to determine their quality rating:** To date, BrightStars conducts the training for teachers and teacher assistants for the ERS, as well as the on-site assessments. Since December 2016, BrightStars has served more than 280 teachers and providers in ERS trainings. In 2017, the Center for Early Learning Professionals served 36 providers in ERS trainings. Beginning Fall 2018, all ERS trainings will be facilitated by the CELP and R2LP in partnership with BrightStars, in order to expand capacity for BrightStars to conduct additional ERS for providers seeking higher star ratings.
- **DHS has secured training for all BrightStars Assessors to become reliable in the ECERS-3 tool this fall:** Cost assessments to train all BrightStars Assessors in the ECERS-3 tool were considered during these data analytics meetings. DHS will commit to training all BrightStars Assessors in the ECERS-3 tool in Fall 2018. RIDE's early childhood team will also participate in this training. An adjustment in cut-scores will only be considered as a simultaneous adjustment with the transition to the new ECERS tool. DHS will work closely with BrightStars, RIDE and community partners to assess scoring within each domain to determine whether an adjustment in cut-scores is appropriate to better reflect common practice among early childhood settings. Beginning Winter 2018-2019, BrightStars will begin piloting the ECERS-3 tool with a handful of centers. The timeline for a full transition to the ECERS-3 tool has not yet been decided.
- **BrightStars will recalibrate its policies for scoring the Personal Care and Routines domain:** According to BrightStars data, programs typically score lowest in the

Personal Care Routines Domain. BrightStars will adjust the scoring of handwashing and other items in the personal care routines subscale to reflect changes made in the ECERS-3. As a result, programs that are consistently and intentionally attempting to complete handwashing and personal care routines according to proper procedure will now be eligible to score higher on the items that consider these best practices. BrightStars will continue to train its Accessors to implement this new policy in Fall 2018.

- **BrightStars will maintain its operation as the Data Hub and will coordinate monthly partnership meetings with DHS-funded community partners to coordinate supports effectively and efficiently:** BrightStars will continue to operate as the “Data Hub” for all quality assessments completed within early learning programs. They will share data, as appropriate, to the state's community partners to focus resources on the programs which need it the most. RIDE's early childhood team will meet monthly with the DHS' Office of Child Care to discuss programs and ways in which the two departments can better collaborate.

### **Think Tank Recommendation 2:**

Environment Rating Scale (ERS): Assure sufficient capacity to meet the demand by teachers and program administrators for ERS training.

#### **DHS Action:**

To date, ERS trainings for teachers and teacher assistants have been primarily offered through BrightStars. Starting Fall 2018, the Center for Early Learning Professionals and Ready to Learn Providence will offer ERS trainings for program administrators, education coordinators, teachers and family child care providers, in close collaboration with BrightStars, to support all providers in understanding the assessment tool used in the Quality Rating Improvement System. CELP will offer ECERS and ITERS trainings for center-based providers and administrators and R2LP will offer FCCERS trainings for family child care providers. These trainings will provide the workforce with a general understanding and knowledge in the use of the ERS tool. It will also include targeted technical assistance from the CELP in close collaboration with BrightStars' Navigators to support programs in improving their quality rating. Recruitment for these trainings will prioritize programs who are rated at the star level 1 and 2. BrightStars has created operational guidance to support their training materials for appropriate transference to CELP and R2LP.

Additionally, this winter, BrightStars will pilot “practice/preliminary” ERS on a cohort of family child care and center-based CCAP providers to ensure providers understand the ERS and reduce anxiety before applying for their increased star rating. Providers who participate in the pilot will be required to have all their staff (including leadership) complete the ERS training prior to the preliminary ERS. These providers must also demonstrate a commitment to applying for an increased star rating after the preliminary assessment. This will allow providers the opportunity to collect constructive

feedback on their performance and implement changes to improve practice prior to their renewal/star rating increase application.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

**Think Tank Recommendation 3:**

ERS: Work closely with FCC providers to reshape the ERS training so that it is more meaningful to the FCC community.

**DHS Action:**

Beginning Fall 2018, Ready to Learn Providence will be hosting FCCRS training for all family child care providers. Imbedded into this model will be an opportunity for family child care providers to receive individual or small group technical assistance relevant to the expectations in the tool. BrightStars will begin piloting a program in which family child care providers at the 2-Star level, who may qualify for a higher star rating and who participate in coaching and technical assistance, may be offered a "preliminary" FCCERS assessment, based on current BrightStars policies, to prepare more fully for an observation and to gain a better understanding of the tool and observation expectations.

DHS is partnering with SEIU 1199 this fall to pilot the FCCRS with four family child care providers to gauge how additional support could be leveraged to best serve the family child care community.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

**Think Tank Recommendation 4:**

Expand on-site coaching and mentoring on the ERS to providers at BrightStars levels 1 and 2 to reduce anxiety and build confidence. Providers should not wait until they have met teacher qualifications at Level 3 to start working on improving program practices. Improve communications and other strategies to ensure that providers are aware of these supports.

**DHS Action:**

All providers (at every star level) will have the opportunity to attend an ERS training offered at either the CELP or R2LP. Beginning Fall 2018, these trainings will be offered quarterly by both organizations and will include on-site coaching and mentoring. BrightStars has operationalized the materials for appropriate transference and will be providing oversight to ensure program fidelity in administering the assessment tool.

Coaching, mentoring, assessment and tutoring are embedded in the Rhode Island Early Childhood and Training Program (12-college credits) at CCRI. Additionally, the CDA program at CCRI uses a cohort model, providing technology training and includes on-site coaching and mentoring to support moving theory into practice. The program was originally piloted in December 2017. Feedback from participating providers and

instructors prompted an adjustment to the program, expanding it from 14 to 16 weekly meetings to increase students' digital literacy skills and competencies this fall.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

**Think Tank Recommendation 5:**

For school age, also allow the use of the SACERS for the self-assessment. Provide an option of using either the RIPQA or the SACERS.

**DHS Action:**

The SACERS will be allowed for use as the self-assessment.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

**Think Tank Recommendation 6:**

Improve and expand supports, including mentors, to assist programs with self-assessment and plan development so that programs can maximize continuous quality improvement.

**DHS Action:**

Moving forward, community-based organizations funded by the Department of Human Services to support professional development opportunities among child care providers (namely CELP and R2LP) will offer fewer course offerings, but will prioritize an integrated, cohort model approach which provides the workforce with opportunities for on-site coaching and mentoring. This technical assistance will be directly connected to the professional development that they receive and will enable providers to practice implementation of the skills they learn during their courses.

The CELP and BrightStars have developed a Technical Assistance Collaboration Team which assesses providers' needs and develops strong action plans to target small group and individual technical assistance to improve quality standards for programs. DHS will continue to support this work through active contract management with its community-based partners.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

**Think Tank Recommendation 7:**

Make an observation by BrightStars reliable raters an option at BrightStars Level 2 to support quality improvement.

**DHS Action:**

Providers who apply for a 3-Star BrightStars rating will receive an on-site ERS assessment. 1- and 2-Star providers can, and should, participate in the ERS trainings and small group technical assistance to prepare for the on-site assessment. Providers can apply up to three times every year for a BrightStars rating increase.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

**Think Tank Recommendation 8:**

At Level 5, clarify the requirement so that certified “valid and reliable” child assessment tools can be used, but other child assessment tools can also be used, as defined by BrightStars.

**DHS Action:**

The Level 5 requirements will allow other child assessment tools to be used, as long as they are approved by the BrightStars team. BrightStars has developed a rubric for evaluating homegrown assessment tools. RIDE has approved this rubric for use in evaluating programs' tools.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

## Section 2: DHS & DCYF Licensing Alignment

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### **Think Tank Recommendation 9:**

Licensing compliance is essential. Work with DCYF to continue to ensure consistent licensing measurement and enforcement as part of the foundation for BrightStars.

#### **DHS Action:**

The Office of Child Care at the Department of Human Services is working closely with the Child Care Licensing Unit at Department of Children Youth and Families to better understand, and streamline, the two offices for closer alignment and collaboration. The Departments have identified key strategies for improving collaboration between units, including biweekly meetings between the Chief of Licensing at DCYF and the Assistant Director of Child Care at the Department of Human Services.

DCYF mandates that all licensed child care providers complete the Health and Safety Modules made available by the Center for Early Learning Professionals. Over the summer, Center for Early Learning Professionals (CELP) has prioritized a redesign of the modules, supplementing its offerings with additional content to strengthen foundational support of basic licensing compliance for all child care providers. Additional modules focused on the following topics were/will be added by 10/1/18:

- Prioritization of homeless children and families (e.g., outreach, support and coordinated service delivery to vulnerable populations impacted by homelessness)
- Emergency Planning Response and Recovery
- Serving children with special needs in early learning programs

Beginning this fall, all professional development offered through the CELP, Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP) and Genesis Center will feature support, and reinforcement, of licensing regulations for child care providers. Additionally, to ensure that providers have the resources they need to earn and maintain licensing compliance, 70% of professional development funded by the Department of Human Services in 2018-2019 will be geared toward 1 and 2-Star providers to support their advancement along the Quality Rating Improvement System.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

### **Think Tank Recommendation 10:**

Improve the licensing regulations so that they are clearer around capacity and staffing for family child care.

#### **DHS Action:**

DCYF, in partnership with DHS, will be promulgating new family child care regulations in Fall 2018. This was done after considerable stakeholder feedback across the state.

DCYF conducted a listening tour with many groups when considering the implications of promulgating new health and safety regulations. This listening tour spanned throughout the summer of 2018 and included focus groups with providers, state advisory council and other key stakeholders in early childhood.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018.



## Section 3: BrightStars' Framework Improvements

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### **Think Tank Recommendation 11:**

Change the kindergarten group size and ratio to match licensing (for School Age framework only)

#### **DHS Action:**

The BrightStars framework will match DCYF licensing standards for kindergarten group size and ratio.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

### **Think Tank Recommendation 12:**

Change the progression so that Level 4 developmental screening and collaboration matches Level 5.

#### **DHS Action:**

This recommendation would make it more challenging for providers to advance along the quality continuum. Instead of updating the framework, DHS will prioritize with its partners an increased focus in professional development trainings for providers who work with children with special needs. Both the Center, and Ready to Learn Providence, are offering trainings this fall which will aim to support providers in understanding strategies to improve practice in this domain.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

### **Think Tank Recommendation 13:**

Inclusive Classroom Practices: explore whether there is a way to have measurable practices; money and supports are a concern for child care programs to serve children with disabilities and developmental challenges.

#### **DHS Action:**

DHS partners and funds SUCCESS, a program offered by Bradley Hospital which prioritizes programmatic consultation services for early childhood programs across the state who serve children with behavioral/special needs. Bradley will continue to be a strong partner as DHS considers ways in which it can strengthen its professional development offerings.

DHS is also participating in a state-wide work group convened by the Governor's Office, to prioritize and better understand existing mental health supports in the state

and ways in which we can better coordinate these offerings to simplify resources and improve outcomes for children in Rhode Island.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

#### **Think Tank Recommendation 14:**

The Think Tank recommends a phased in approach for implementation. Phase One would be to implement the standards recommendations contained in this report within the existing block rating model. Phase Two would be exploring a Hybrid model after seeing the impact of the implemented revisions.

#### **DHS Action:**

DHS will follow this recommendation and closely track the quality advancement across early childhood programs in the state of Rhode Island.

Upward mobility for programs engaged in the quality rating improvement system will be a driver for determining whether an adjustment in the model should be considered in 2019. If 1- and 2-Star programs continue to struggle with opportunities for growth and advancement, considerations for adjusting the rating model will be prioritized with a similar group to those who participated in the Think Tank.

#### **Timeline:**

Phase One: Fall 2018

Phase Two: Revisit block rating model in Fall 2019, after adjustments in the standards have been appropriately piloted.

#### **Think Tank Recommendation 15:**

The Think Tank also recommends convening a BrightStars advisory group that continues to meet several times per year, composed of a similar group as the Think Tank.

#### **DHS Action:**

A BrightStars advisory group with membership like that of the Think Tank will be developed Winter 2018 and will include additional members (including representatives from institutions of higher education) to engage in quarterly discussions on how to continuously support programs, and the workforce, to advance along the quality continuum. Beginning this fall, DHS will be instituting a case management approach with programs who serve CCAP children to ensure all resources are appropriately coordinated to advance quality outcomes for children served in child care.

DHS has begun to actively outreach programs who participate in the quality rating improvement system, but do not accept CCAP. Individualized outreach by the Department will encourage more programs to serve children with subsidies in the coming year.

BrightStars will be working to establish a communications plan to actively outreach programs not currently participating in the quality rating improvement system to do so.

DHS will maintain and enforce its policy that all programs must participate in the quality rating improvement system (BrightStars) in order to serve CCAP children in their programs.

**Timeline:** Winter 2018

## Section 4: Workforce Development & Credentialing

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### **Think Tank Recommendation 16:**

Reconsider the progression of staff qualifications to make Level 3 more attainable by allowing a stand-alone CDA or 3 college credits. (Does not impact the 75% of staff requirement.)

#### **DHS Action:**

The BrightStars Framework for family child care, center and preschool programs, will honor the CDA, or 3 college credits in ECE/related field, as a stand-alone credential for providers to achieve 3-Stars. To prepare for such an adjustment, CCRI has doubled the capacity for the Infant/Toddler CDA this Fall 2018. CCRI will serve 40 child care providers (20 family child care providers and 20 center-based providers) who work in CCAP-approved programs and are actively engaged in BrightStars. The CDA coursework at CCRI is an integrated 16-week cohort model that blends in-class instruction with on-site coaching and mentoring, at no cost to the provider. Beginning this fall, it will integrate technology support for providers so that they feel prepared to continue their path in higher education. As part of the CDA, the provider must also have a written individual professional development plan aligned with the RI's Workforce Knowledge and Competencies Framework. This pathway is funded through DHS quality dollars and will continue to be prioritized during the 2019 fiscal year. CCRI is currently working with DHS to explore opportunities for further expansion in Spring 2019. DHS and CCRI will continue to work collaboratively to develop effective and responsive programming for the early childhood education workforce.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

### **Think Tank Recommendation 17:**

Consider including continuing education in lieu of course credit; specifics to be further developed.

#### **DHS Action:**

DHS funds two organizations who offer high quality professional development for early learning professionals across the state, the Center for Early Learning Professionals and Ready to Learn Providence.

Continuing education, or professional development approved by the Center for Early Learning Professionals, is an integral component to the CDA course requirements offered by CCRI. Additionally, DCYF regulations require a minimum of 20 hours of professional development annually (10 of which must be approved by the Center for Early Learning Professionals) for all child care providers.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

**Think Tank Recommendation 18:**

Reduce college credits at Level 5 from 24 to 18 college credits.

**DHS Action:**

The BrightStars framework for family child care, center and preschool programs will maintain the college credits requirement at Level 5 at 24 credits. The BrightStars framework will also maintain the college credits requirement at Level 4 at 12 college credits in ECE/related field. This clearly reflects the pathway endorsed for the early learning workforce by DHS. This pathway accurately represents the existing skill set of the workforce currently serving in early childhood programs across the state and provides meaningful incremental steps for achieving higher credentials which support quality.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

**Think Tank Recommendation 19:**

Determine which fields could be accepted in full as related, rather than make course-by-course determinations in all fields (for example: ALL psychology courses instead of select ones.)

**DHS Action:** Any course titled as Early Childhood Education is automatically accepted. Sometimes these courses are titled something different, depending upon the university or college offering the course. All the early childhood courses at URI, RIC, CCRI and PC are accepted. Some fields, not all, are accepted in full. This recommendation has larger implications in defining what is an early childhood education/related field. DHS will prioritize this topic in the Quarterly BrightStars Advisory Meetings. It will require extensive input from partners in institutions of higher education.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

**Think Tank Recommendation 20:**

Improve communication and coordination with CCRI and other institutions of higher education.

**DHS Action:**

DHS has instituted monthly meetings with the team at CCRI to prioritize supports for the early learning workforce. Additionally, the Department hosted its first Quarterly Workforce Development Meeting in August 2018. This was an opportunity for all partners to align their fall professional development offerings to the BrightStars framework. Participants in this meeting included institutions of higher education, Rhode Island College, Roger Williams University and the Community College of Rhode Island. These meetings will continue over the course of the next year. A cohesive document outlining the professional development opportunities available to child care providers (both

center-based and family child care) will be made available to the community on the DHS website by October 1, 2018. Link:

<http://www.dhs.ri.gov/Programs/CCAPProviderResourceNewPageLAC.php>.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

#### **Think Tank Recommendation 21:**

In FCC, consider qualifications of either the provider or designated full-time assistant(s) when determining whether staff qualifications have been met.

#### **DHS Action:**

This recommendation will be addressed in the updated progression of staff qualifications which recognizes the CDA or 3 credits in ECE/related field at the 3-Star level.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

#### **Think Tank Recommendation 22:**

Look deeper into a workforce strategy to allow some flexibility in teacher credentials at Level 4 or above. For example, if a teacher is enrolled in classes and provides evidence that she/he is going to receive a credential within a set amount of time (example: 3-6 months,) the program would get credit towards a higher rating and any associated monetary support (tiered rates) for attaining this rating.

#### **DHS Action:**

BrightStars allows providers to apply for an increased star rating at any given point within their rating cycle and reviews these applications within 30 days. Additionally, BrightStars' policy allows providers to apply for an increased star rating up to three times a year as long as the provider demonstrates a commitment to increased quality. With the recognition of the CDA (or 3 college credits in an ECE related field), the Department feels confident in its ability to provide tailored incentives to providers to advance along the quality rating improvement system.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

#### **Think Tank Recommendation 23:**

Early Childhood Education/Related Fields: Better distribution of the guidance about what is a related field and the processes for reviewing.

**DHS Action:** BrightStars provides two guiding documents—both of which are linked on the BrightStars homepage under "Important Announcements,"

[http://www.brightstars.org/\[brightstars.org\]](http://www.brightstars.org/[brightstars.org]) and here directly:

[http://www.brightstars.org/educators/quality-improvement-resources\[brightstars.org.\]](http://www.brightstars.org/educators/quality-improvement-resources[brightstars.org.]) These documents are titled, "Guide to Early Childhood Education/Related Field" and [Current Coursework for ECE Programs in Rhode Island \[docs.google.com.\]](#) Moving forward, BrightStars' Navigators and Assessors will refer programs to these guidance documents. Additionally, BrightStars will share these documents in newsletters, via social media and blog updates to ensure all providers have information on the related fields.

**Timeline:** Fall 2018

#### **Think Tank Recommendation 24:**

Rhode Island Early Learning & Development Standards (RIELDS): Revise the entire RIELDS system, including but not limited to a focus on revision of training, reduction of total training hours, use of a competency-based approach, access to online or other strategies to improve accessibility, improved connections to program practice, and consideration of reciprocity with other states. This work needs to be thorough and comprehensive, and thus should be done over an appropriate timeframe.

#### **DHS Action:**

DHS, in partnership with RIDE and other key stakeholders in the early childhood community, will redesign the RIELDS trainings over the course of the next year to make the trainings more accessible and relevant to the early learning workforce.

As a first step, Harriet Dichter will facilitate a focus group in October 2018 with the RIELDS authors, leaders in early childhood and key state agency leads to develop recommendations.

This work is being prioritized, and funded, through the Think Babies Campaign (RI Kids Count) as a strategy to prioritize, and increase, wages for the infant/toddler workforce.

As an immediate next step to prioritize increased access to RIELDS trainings for all early childhood educators, RIDE has posted an updated calendar of its offerings for Fall 2018, in order to meet the demand of providers seeking these trainings.

#### **Timeline:**

October 2018: Focus Group

2018-2019: Revision of the RIELDS Trainings into more condensed, tailored trainings

## **Appendix A: Participant List**

DHS thanks all its partners who participated in the Think Tank and committed endless hours to reviewing the recommendations and the potential implications of their implementation. The BrightStars Quarterly Advisory Group will support ongoing reflection on the standards and provide opportunities for further collaboration among state agencies and community-based partners. The Department is committed to supporting the early learning workforce to ensure all of Rhode Island's children receive the supports they need to meet the Governor's third grade reading goal.

### **Participants:**

Khadija Lewis Khan, Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center

Sue Washburn, Center for Early Learning Professionals

Amy Vogel, Dr. Day Care

Donna Chartier, Family Child Care Homes of Rhode Island

Leanne Barrett, RI KIDS COUNT

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, RI KIDS COUNT

Cindy Larson, Local Initiatives Support Corporation

Kim O'Connell, Providence Public School District

Leslie Gell, Ready to Learn Providence

Lisa Hildebrand, RIAEYC, BrightStars and T.E.A.C.H.

Patty Carbone, RI Childcare Directors Association

MaryAnn Shallcross Smith, RI Business Owners in Child Care Association

Mary Varr, RI Head Start Association

Chas Walker, SEIU 1199

Maria Fajardo, SEIU 1199

Kate Messier, YMCA of Greater Providence

Veronica Davis, Department of Children, Youth and Families

Ashley O'Shea, Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Michael Cronan, Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Jaclyn Porfolio, Governor's Office

Cara Harrison, Governor's Office



Lisa Nugent, RI Department of Education

Ruth Gallucci, RI Department of Education

Rep. Grace Diaz, RI State Representative

Questions, or comments, on the proposed changes should be directed to:

Caitlin Molina

Assistant Director of Child Care

[Caitlin.Molina@dhs.ri.gov](mailto:Caitlin.Molina@dhs.ri.gov)