

2024 -- S 2493

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

SENATE RESOLUTION

PROCLAIMING FEBRUARY 15, 2024 TO BE "RHODE ISLAND FIRST CONNECTIONS
AWARENESS DAY"

Introduced By: Senator Bridget Valverde

Date Introduced: February 15, 2024

Referred To: Recommended for Immediate Consideration

1 WHEREAS, Voluntary, high-quality home-visiting programs help families learn about
2 and connect to essential resources, adjust to parenthood, build parenting skills, and address
3 challenges commonly faced by families; and

4 WHEREAS, For at least four decades, Rhode Island's First Connections program,
5 overseen by the Department of Health, has been providing free, voluntary, statewide home-
6 visiting to pregnant women and to families with newborns, infants, and toddlers, reaching about
7 thirty-five percent of families with new babies; and

8 WHEREAS, Families typically receive one to four home visits which are culturally-
9 competent, comprehensive and delivered by registered nurses and social workers in the client's
10 home; and

11 WHEREAS, First Connection services include, but are not limited to, linkages to
12 Department of Human Services, WIC, obstetricians, pediatricians, housing and domestic
13 violence; and

14 WHEREAS, First Connections serves as a safety net in Rhode Island, helping to ensure
15 that new born babies are safe when they are discharged from the birthing Hospital, and that they
16 receive services to help prevent child fatalities and near fatalities; and

17 WHEREAS, First Connections staff are supporting families with developmental
18 screenings for all children in the home and making referrals to local school systems as needed;
19 and

1 WHEREAS, First Connections is the first point of contact for the State's other priorities
2 including ensuring newborn Safe Sleep, supporting parents with substance affected newborns,
3 preventing DCYF involvement, providing basic needs supports and substance and mental health
4 treatment referrals; and

5 WHEREAS, Eligibility for First Connections is determined by a screening tool
6 implemented through the hospital and the Department of Health. Examples of eligibility: age, (a
7 teenage mother, or a mother over 36 and a first baby), low income, multiple pregnancies under
8 the age of 21, homelessness, history of domestic violence, history of mental illness, substance
9 abuse and involvement with Department of Children, Youth and Families; and

10 WHEREAS, Community providers are able to make referrals for pregnant mothers who
11 are at high risk and the Department of Children, Youth and Families additionally make referrals
12 to the program to meet the federal CAPTA requirements; and

13 WHEREAS, First Connections is funded with federal Individuals with Disabilities
14 Education Act Part C resources, Medicaid billing, and other federal grants; and

15 WHEREAS, Prior to a temporary, one-year increase in State fiscal year 2023-2024, the
16 Medicaid rates for First Connections services have not increased since 2000; and

17 WHEREAS, Inadequate funding had resulted in significant program staffing challenges
18 and an average operating loss for First Connections programs of one hundred thirty-six dollars
19 and seventy cents per visit; and

20 WHEREAS, Following the establishment of the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early
21 Childhood Home Visiting program in 2010, Rhode Island expanded home-visiting services to
22 include several longer-term, comprehensive, and evidence-based program models with strong
23 evidence they improve short-term and long-term outcomes for children and families; and

24 WHEREAS, In 2022, the federal funding was reauthorized and now includes a twenty-
25 five percent state match requirement to receive base federal funding to sustain existing programs
26 and new expansion funds. The state match requirement will go into effect in federal fiscal year
27 2024; now, therefore be it

28 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island hereby recognizes the short-
29 term and long-term benefits of voluntary, high quality, culturally responsive home-visiting
30 services to pregnant and parenting families with newborns, infants, and toddlers; and be it further

31 RESOLVED, That this Senate hereby proclaims February 15, 2024, to be "Rhode Island
32 First Connections Awareness Day"; and be it further

33 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
34 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to First Connections, and the Director/Interim

1 Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health.

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