

## JOCELYN P. ANTONIO, MPH

**Testimony on H-5196, Child Care for Child Care Educators & EI Staff (RI Works)**  
**House Finance Committee**  
**May 22, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Abeny and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is **Jocelyn Antonio**. I am a resident of the town of Cumberland. I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity as a public health professional.

I am writing to express my **strong support** for **House Bill 5196 – An Act Relating to Human Services – The Rhode Island Works Program**, sponsored by Representative Diaz and co-sponsored by Representatives Shallcross Smith, Caldwell, Craven, Cruz, Slater, Edwards, Casimiro, Donovan, and McNamara.

This bill proposes to expand the program to allow higher income early educators to participate and to make staff of Early Intervention programs eligible to help recruit and retain qualified EI staff and reduce the waiting list for Early Intervention services.

### **Public Health Implications of Accessible Childcare**

According to the **American Public Health Association**, **education access and quality is a core social influencer of health** - a non-medical factor that significantly impacts **health outcomes**. Educational attainment is the **single greatest predictor of a person's health and well-being across the life span**.<sup>1</sup> Quality **early childcare** plays a **critical role in health and development, supporting learning, behavior, and social-emotional skills**, while also supporting **long-term mental and physical health**.

Numerous studies have shown that access to **high-quality, affordable childcare is associated with:**

- Improved school readiness and academic achievement<sup>2</sup>
- Increased parental workforce participation and economic mobility<sup>3</sup>
- Reduced behavioral and emotional challenges for children
- Improved maternal mental health and family well-being

### **Maternal Health and the Child Care Crisis**

The **United States is facing a maternal health crisis**, despite spending **more per capita on maternal health than any other country**.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. has the **highest rate of maternal deaths among high-income nations**, and these disparities disproportionately impact **Black and Indigenous women**.<sup>5</sup> Access to **affordable, high-quality childcare is a crucial component of postpartum support**.

Research has found that:

- **Access to childcare** helps protect mothers from experiencing depressive symptoms.

---

<sup>1</sup> CDC, "Social Determinants of Health"; American Public Health Association, "Education and Health."

<sup>2</sup> Schneider and Gibbs, "Disparities in Housing, Health Care, Child Care, and Economic Security Affect Babies for Life"; Malik, "Growing the Economy Through Affordable Child Care"; Birchfield Kennedy, JD, "Child Care and Early Education Is a Social Determinant of Health—For Children and Adults"; Foundation, "The Impact of the High Cost of Child Care."

<sup>3</sup> Birchfield Kennedy, JD, "Child Care and Early Education Is a Social Determinant of Health—For Children and Adults"; Lieberman, "Lack of Access to Child Care Impacts Child Well-Being."

<sup>4</sup> Every Mother Counts, "The United States."

<sup>5</sup> Gunja et al., "Insights into the U.S. Maternal Mortality Crisis."

- **Reliable childcare reduces** the impact of sleep deprivation, lowering the risk of maternal depression.<sup>6</sup>
- **Children in high-quality childcare are less likely to experience the negative emotional and behavioral effects** of maternal mental health disorders and other challenging family circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, **childcare access remains deeply unequal**. Data indicates that **57.3% of Latino/Hispanic families live in childcare deserts—a disproportionately higher rate** than the general population (50.5%). Combined with **higher maternal mental health disorders in Latino/Hispanic** communities (40%), this underscores why passing House Bill 5281 is essential for public health and racial equity.<sup>8</sup>

### **Supporting the Child Care Workforce**

Childcare educators are foundational to early childhood development, providing essential services that influence long-term health outcomes. However, many of these professionals face economic challenges that hinder their ability to access affordable childcare for their own families. By removing the sunset provision, H-5196 ensures sustained support for these educators, allowing them to continue their vital work without the added stress of securing childcare.

### **Conclusion**

Eliminating the sunset provision on childcare assistance for educators is not only a matter of workforce support but also a strategic public health intervention. It promotes the health of children, supports the mental well-being of parents, and contributes to the economic stability of families. I urge the committee to support and pass H-5196 to ensure the continued health and prosperity of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jocelyn P. Antonio, MPH  
[joantoni@bu.edu](mailto:joantoni@bu.edu)

---

<sup>6</sup> Armstrong et al., “Use of Child Care Attenuates the Link Between Decreased Maternal Sleep and Increased Depressive Symptoms”; Shapard, “Analyzing the Effects of Postpartum Support on Maternal and Child Outcomes.”

<sup>7</sup> Seiler et al., “Long-Term Promotive and Protective Effects of Early Childcare Quality on the Social–Emotional Development in Children”; Goelman et al., “Maternal Mental Health, Child Care Quality, and Children’s Behavior”; Wilhelmsen et al., “Children’s Mental Health.”

<sup>8</sup> Britt, “Childcare Access.”

## **Reference:**

- Callahan, Katrina, Kevin Wyatt, Katherine Owens, and Lyndi Buckingham-Schutt. "SNAP Healthy Food Pricing Incentive Programs: State Comparison & Evaluation." Drake University, 2022. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://harkinstitute.drake.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/103/2022/08/SNAP-Incentive-Report\_v5.pdf?utm\_source=chatgpt.com.
- Farm Fresh Rhode Island. "Cultivating Regional Growth: Expanding the New England Nutrition Incentive." United States Department of Agriculture, 2022. https://portal.nifa.usda.gov/web/crisprojectpages/1029389-cultivating-regional-growth-expanding-the-new-england-nutrition-incentive-system.html?utm\_source=chatgpt.com.
- Food Bank, Rhode Island Community. "2024 Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island," 2025. https://rifoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-Status-Report\_Web.pdf.
- Rhode Island Department of Health. "Enhancing Nutrition Security: An Overview of Fruit and Vegetable Programs in Rhode Island." Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Health, March 2025. https://health.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur1006/files/2025-04/Enhancing-Nutrition-Security.pdf?utm\_source=chatgpt.com.
- Rummo, Pasquale E., Reece Lyster, Jennifer Rose, Yelena Malyuta, Eliza Dexter Cohen, and Amy Nunn. "The Impact of Financial Incentives on SNAP Transactions at Mobile Produce Markets." *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 18 (February 8, 2021): 26. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01093-z.
- Weinberg, Kobi. "Incentivizing SNAP Beneficiaries to Purchase Healthier Food." Providence, RI: Brown University, 2020. https://ibes.brown.edu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Weinberg%2CKobi\_Thesis\_2020.pdf.