



**Testimony Re: H-5197, Removing Child Support Enforcement from the Child Care Assistance Program (RI Works)**  
**House Finance Committee**  
**May 22, 2025**  
**Leanne Barrett, Director of Early Childhood Policy and Strategy**



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 will help families with young children.

**Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support Representative Grace Diaz's bill, H-5197**, which would remove the statutory requirement for any applicant or participant in the RI Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to establish paternity or parentage and to pursue child support enforcement as an eligibility requirement for the program (this change is also proposed in Senator Vargas's Child Care is Essential bill).

Attached is Alba's Story, a single mom working as an assistant manager at a restaurant and studying nursing at CCRI, who qualifies for the Child Care Assistance Program to help cover the \$1,000/month cost for child care for her one year old and thus has been required to participate in the state's child support enforcement actions. She says "I am constantly drained by the emotional toll of pursuing child support, compounded by extensive paperwork and countless court appearances that conflict with my work schedule. Missing work isn't an option for me, as I need to maintain enough hours to cover my monthly bills."

This bill was supported by the Department of Human Services and passed the full Senate in 2024. Over 40 organizations, including the RI Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Education Association of Rhode Island, the Newport Chamber of Commerce, Rhode Island AFL-CIO, Rhode Island Child Care Directors Association, the RI Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, SEIU 1199 NE, and the Women's Fund of RI, signed onto a [letter](#) sent to the Governor in November 2024 asking for a repeal of this statutory requirement.

Most states have never imposed this requirement since no other program designed to support child development and early learning has this requirement in place. The federal government does not require or recommend this requirement.

We have been working with advocates across the U.S. to determine which states have this requirement in place as some states that were listed as having the requirement have not had the requirement in place for many years (including Connecticut which stopped in 2006 and New York which stopped in 2009). Mississippi ended the practice in 2023, and Michigan stopped in 2024.

Using the federal database of state child care policies managed by the Urban Institute and confirming with state advocates and administrators, we believe there are only 9 states that currently impose this outdated and burdensome requirement: Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont (which they only apply to parents who were married and are now separated/divorced), and Wisconsin.

Rhode Island added this requirement into the Child Care Assistance statute in 2006. National experts strongly recommend that states that have this requirement in place remove it, stating “**There is no evidence to suggest that child support enforcement in child care subsidy processes improves compliance or helps families gain access to additional funds to improve their financial security** and therefore does not justify this increased burden on families or staff in already strained systems.

Compliance often involves many “hoops” for family members to jump through, including establishing parentage (sometimes through genetic testing), identifying, and locating noncustodial parents, and providing private and often sensitive information. **This may require that parents attend court appointments and participate in multiple legal proceedings, which can take place over many years.** Some family structures mean that one child may be impacted while others in the family are not, further complicating access to child care and economic security for the entire family.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and for Representative Diaz’s leadership on this issue.



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

### **Alba's Story**

#### **Unusual and Burdensome State Child Support Enforcement Requirement Makes It Difficult to Access Child Care Subsidy**

My name is Alba, a determined single mother of a one-year-old. I am a hardworking mom, currently studying nursing at the Community College of Rhode Island, and I work full-time as an assistant manager at a restaurant. My primary goal is to be a voice for other moms in my position—those who remain silent despite facing similar challenges.

Affording childcare is one of my greatest struggles. Even though I budget carefully to live within my means, my income still isn't enough to cover the \$1,000 monthly childcare costs. I rely on the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Care Care Assistance Program (CCAP) subsidy to help pay for child care so I can keep working and providing for my family.

Yet, I face a difficult reality: **Rhode Island is one of only a handful of states that require low-wage working parents to participate in child support enforcement actions in order to qualify for a child care subsidy.** This requirement is very unusual and burdensome and not part of any other program designed to support early childhood development.

Navigating the Child Support Enforcement system is overwhelming. **I am constantly drained by the emotional toll of pursuing child support, compounded by extensive paperwork and countless court appearances that conflict with my work schedule.** Missing work isn't an option for me, as I need to maintain enough hours to cover my monthly bills.

As a single mother striving to improve myself, provide for my family, and be present for my son, I ask that my words be taken seriously. I speak not only for myself but for other young, single mothers who are held back by fear from sharing their struggles. **Each month, my anxiety grows as I worry about losing my job due to missing work for various court appointments, failing my child, and facing judgment from DHS officials.** The subsidy intended to ease financial strain and enable my son to access a high-quality child care setting, has instead become a weight, holding me in a relentless cycle of stress related to child support enforcement.

We are fighting to build better lives for our families and need a fair chance to improve without compromising our mental health. I urge you to remove the child support enforcement requirement from the child care subsidy system, so hard working mothers like myself can finally get ahead.



# CHILD CARE: THE BACKBONE OF A STRONG STATE ECONOMY

## *Two Key Child Care Priorities for Governor's FY26 Budget*

Businesses lose money when they can't find staff and when their employees don't show up to work. Parents' inability to access and afford reliable, quality child care contributes to the statewide labor shortage, particularly in female-dominated jobs in health care, education, human services, and hospitality. **We ask Governor McKee to strongly consider including two proposals in his FY26 budget proposal to stabilize and strengthen access to child care.** Both proposals have widespread national and state support, minimal budget impact, and would significantly help families with young children.

### **1) Remove Regressive Requirement from the Child Care Assistance Program**

Trust moms to make the decision about whether to pursue child support. Participation in Child Support Enforcement Rhode Island state law requires that applicants participate in Child Support Enforcement as an eligibility requirement for Child Care Assistance. We should trust moms to make the decision about whether to pursue child support. Participation in Child Support Enforcement is not required to qualify for any other early care and education programs. Most states never had this requirement in place, and almost all of those that did have removed it. There are only 9 states that currently impose this requirement - Connecticut stopped in 2006, New York stopped in 2009, and Mississippi stopped in 2023. National experts strongly recommend that states that have this requirement in place remove it, stating "there is no evidence to suggest that child support enforcement in child care subsidy processes helps families gain access to additional funds to improve their financial security."

### **2) Make the Child Care for Child Care Educators Program Permanent**

An effective strategy to recruit and retain early educators statewide, the Rhode Island Child Care for Child Care Educators program began in August 2023 and covers the cost of child care for qualifying staff who work in child care programs. **Nearly half of the licensed child care and early learning centers in the state have at least one staff person participating.** Rhode Island has been a pioneering state in adopting this strategy which is expanding across the country. Recommended by the federal government and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Rhode Island has received positive attention at both the [national level](#) and [local level](#) for this program.

#### **Supported By**

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