



May 22, 2025

Representative Marvin Abney, Chair

House Finance Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bills 5196, 5197, and 5992: Acts Relating to Human Services –
The Rhode Island Works Program**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for House Bills 5196, 5197, and 5992, which align with our commitment to ensuring that all Rhode Islanders have access to economic opportunity and financial stability. Through the LIFT UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we work to remove barriers to financial security, support workforce development, and strengthen pathways to upward mobility. Ensuring that Rhode Islanders have the resources they need to reach their fullest potential is at the heart of our mission, and the Rhode Island Works Program has consistently expanded economic opportunity by providing high-quality education, training, and job placement that has empowered individuals and families to achieve long-term stability.

United Way of Rhode Island proudly supports the Workforce Alliance, a coalition of adult education professionals that meets monthly with state partners in workforce development. RI Works has empowered the state to build strong partnerships with nonprofits like the Community Action Projects to train participants to work in in-demand professions. Rhode Island's economy has evolved since the inception of RI Works, and the program has grown to reach more communities and train for more professions. The responsiveness of the partner organizations is critical to the program's success, but even more importantly, the participant's success.

This successful model of adult education and workforce development is couched in a trusted community resource center where participants can access other supports like food assistance, childcare, and healthcare. As any member of the Workforce Alliance can demonstrate, wraparound services for adult learners make an enormous difference in program completion and long-term

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economic stability for participants. RI Works is implemented within communities, and the proposed changes in this package of bills expand this strong model to the Rhode Islanders who benefit from workforce development most.

House Bill 5196 recognizes the pilot's success in connecting RI Works participants receiving childcare to childcare education and training, which resulted in staffing increases for this critical industry. By expanding the program to include staff providing early intervention services to infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities, RI Works could bring much-needed staff into this specialized setting and increase the quality of care that disabled infants and toddlers receive.

House Bill 5197 is responsive to the barriers families receive to enrollment in the RI Works childcare assistance program, which presently requires cooperation with state services to establish paternity. Although well-intentioned, this provision adds an outsized administrative burden to families in need. Hiding the RI Works childcare assistance behind a barrier of establishing parentage is invasive. Establishing child support is costly and time-consuming, and enforcing medical orders requires enormous legal coordination. Eliminating this barrier would improve enrollment and full benefit utilization for families needing childcare benefits.

Finally, House Bill 5992 improves the benefit calculation for the cash assistance component of the RI Works program to better cover families with one or more children receiving child support. The current program policy allows \$50 of child support to pass through to the family, and the proposed change increases the pass-through to \$100 for one child and \$200 for more than one child. This benefit calculation is responsive to the increased need for cash assistance for larger households; this bill recognizes that more children cost more.

RI Works makes an enormous difference in the financial stability of Rhode Island families. Enrollment in RI Works brings economic empowerment to families and communities; it is an enormously successful workforce development program that United Way's nonprofit partners have leveraged to build wraparound services and employment pipelines that support our state's economy. By supporting House Bills 5196, 5197, and 5992, Rhode Island can continue making strides toward economic mobility. This investment ensures that Rhode Island families can access the resources they need to thrive, reducing long-term reliance on emergency assistance and strengthening local economies. We urge you to support this measure and stand with us in our commitment to creating a Rhode Island where families are more financially secure.

Sincerely,

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Peggy Desjarlais

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