



## Rhode Island Department of Human Services

25 Howard Avenue, Louis Pasteur Building 57 Cranston, RI 02920  
(401) 462-2121 Fax (401) 462-6594

### *Office of the Director*

Kimberly Merolla-Brito

May 22, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney  
Chair, House Committee on Finance  
State House  
82 Smith Steet  
Providence, 02903

**Re: H5995 – An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Department of Human Services**

Dear Chair Abney,

I am writing to you in regard to House Bill 5995, which proposes a \$3,000 stipend for individuals who complete a job training program and the probationary period for designated positions within the RI Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). As the committee reviews this legislation, I am sharing additional information and context on DHS's training and operational structure.

DHS currently provides job-specific training for eligibility technicians, social case workers, child service enforcement agents, and employment career advisors. Each of these positions require specialized instruction because of the different tasks required of these job classifications, which could create an administrative challenge if a single standardized approach is applied as outlined in H5995. Incorporating the additional training program as proposed to enhance recruitment efforts would require additional resources to develop and operationalize.

Importantly, the General Assembly passed legislation in the 2024 session that increased the cadence of Civil Service Exams to quarterly, specifically for the Eligibility Technician I and Social Caseworker roles. The Department of Administration (DOA) and DHS work very closely to identify, interview and provide training to individuals hired through this process. With exams being held quarterly and the state afforded more flexibility in contacting potential candidates, DHS has a consistent pool of candidates to fill critical positions as vacancies occur due to lateral promotions, retirements, or other reasons.

The recent legislative changes to the Civil Service Exam have supported DHS in its hiring activity, and we appreciate the support received from the General Assembly to strengthen our workforce. However, H5995 may have unintended consequences. Current staff who have already completed their training and probationary periods may be incentivized to seek these specific positions and change jobs multiple times to receive the \$3,000 stipend more than once. Based on 2024 hiring data for these positions, we can estimate a minimum recurring yearly cost over \$137,000 to General Revenue with the potential for costs to increase should equity questions be raised.

Since 2022, DHS has largely been successful in filling essential front-facing positions evidenced by the approximate 53% decrease in pending applications awaiting state review (from 2,857 in August 2022 to 1,335 in May 2025). This has been achieved through significant operational changes prioritizing efficiency,

communication, and enhanced engagement with staff about current work flexibilities and benefits – including the current two-day work from home agreement and recently signed Cost of Living Agreement bringing 12% pay increases over three years to unionized staff. The latter was included in the revised FY2025 and proposed FY26 budget.

DHS remains committed to strengthening the public workforce and ensuring sustainable, effective recruitment and retention efforts. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kimberly Merolla-Brito". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kimberly Merolla-Brito  
Director  
RI Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance  
The Honorable David Morales  
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy