

House Finance Committee  
State House, Room 35  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903  
March 25, 2026

**Re:** Testimony Regarding the FY2027 Governor’s Recommended Budget — Department of Human Services (Long-Term Support Services)

**Name:** Brandi Simon; Stephanie Acevedo

**Organization:** SEIU Local 580

**Department/Agency:** Department of Human Services (DHS) — Long-Term Support Services

**Viewpoint:** Testifying with concerns regarding service capacity, automation, and funding levels

Dear Chairperson and Members of the House Finance Committee:

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee. Our names are Brandi Simon and Stephanie Acevedo. We are Social Caseworkers in Long-Term Support Services with over ten years of experience in social work. In our roles, we work directly with elderly and disabled Rhode Islanders who rely on these services to meet their most basic needs.

We are increasingly seeing pressure to automate processes that require human judgment, problem-solving, and compassion—particularly for individuals with disabilities, limited literacy, or no support system to help them navigate services. At the same time, budget constraints, inflation, and delays in service delivery are increasing demand. These trends are moving in opposite directions, and the impact is being felt by the people we serve.

Funding for Assisted Living and Nursing Home services is critical to maintaining stability in the system. Our unit manages a high-volume application and referral pipeline into Conflict-Free Case Management (CFCM), serving as the primary point of contact for Assisted Living Facilities. This work is essential both for participants to access services and for facilities to be reimbursed.

We also process program changes, often under challenging circumstances. For example, when Nursing Homes fail to notify DHS of a discharge, individuals can return home without appropriate Medicaid coverage or home-based services in place. This creates gaps in care and increased reliance on the Virtual Call Center, as individuals and families try to resolve urgent issues after the fact.

Many Rhode Islanders depend on Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) to remain safely in their homes. Demand for these services continues to grow as people live longer and seek alternatives to institutional care. Our unit processes approximately 400 LTSS applications per month, reflecting both the scale and urgency of this need.

At the same time, families are increasingly trying to avoid Nursing Home placement due to concerns about quality of care. This places additional pressure on community-based systems that are already stretched.

Our role has expanded beyond traditional casework. We are often expected to function as case managers, Medicaid specialists, durable medical equipment coordinators, and points of contact for person-centered options counseling. When gaps occur—whether within agencies or across systems—we are the ones who step in to ensure individuals do not fall through.

To illustrate the level of need: within the past week, one of us worked with a man with severe vision impairment to complete an application. During that single visit, multiple unmet needs emerged. He was facing housing instability, relying on SNAP benefits that did not last the full month, and lacked access to basic supports such as dental care and adequate furnishings. He had no family involvement and limited ability to navigate systems independently.

Much of that visit involved reading his mail, making calls on his behalf, and connecting him to resources beyond the initial scope of the application. This work takes time—and requires follow-up—to be effective.

Without sufficient funding and staffing, we will not have the capacity to meet the needs of Rhode Islanders who rely on these services. The recent loss of RIPIN's preventative contract has further shifted responsibilities back onto DHS, increasing workload without a corresponding increase in resources.

There are also ongoing challenges with coordination of care, training for external partners, and the time required for meaningful follow-up with participants. Even working as efficiently as possible, the volume and complexity of cases continue to outpace capacity.

We respectfully ask that you consider the real-world impact of these decisions when reviewing the FY2027 budget.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Brandi Simon

Stephanie Acevedo