

## **Testimony in Support of H 7698**

House Committee on Finance

April 14, 2026

Good evening, Chairwoman McEntee and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Claire Piron, and I am a student at Brown University and Co-Lead of the Food Security Team within the Brown Initiative for Policy.

I come before the Committee today to express my strong support for House Bill 7698.

Rhode Island continues to face significant food insecurity. According to Feeding America, approximately 12.3% of Rhode Islanders are food insecure, representing over 120,000 residents, while state-level estimates suggest up to 38% of households, or 420,000 people, experience difficulty consistently accessing adequate food. At the same time, thousands of tons of edible food are discarded annually across retail, wholesale, and institutional supply chains, reflecting a persistent mismatch between surplus and need.

Food recovery organizations are also operating under sustained capacity constraints. The Rhode Island Community Food Bank and partner agencies report rising demand in recent years, with over 80,000 Rhode Islanders relying on emergency food assistance each month during peak periods, placing continued pressure on nonprofit systems not designed for this level of long-term demand.

House Bill 7698 addresses a key constraint in the food recovery system: the cost of donation. Businesses often face expenses related to labor, refrigeration, packaging, transportation, and coordination, making it cheaper to discard surplus food than donate it, even when it is safe and edible. This bill responds by offering a tax credit equal to 75% of the fair market value of donated food, capped at \$5,000, offsetting a meaningful share of these operational costs.

This matters especially for smaller Rhode Island businesses. For a local independent grocer, caterer, or family farm in places like Little Compton or South Kingstown, a \$5,000 credit can be the difference between discarding surplus food and donating it consistently.

The bill also delivers environmental co-benefits. Food is a major component of municipal solid waste, and when landfilled, it produces methane emissions. Diverting edible food to donation reduces landfill burden and supports Rhode Island's climate goals under the Act on Climate.

There is strong historical precedent for this approach. When federal tax incentives were expanded in 2006 to include all business types, food donations increased by approximately 137% in a single year. While multiple factors contributed, the strongest gains came from small businesses, grocers, and farmers, who gained a viable financial pathway to donate surplus food. H 7698 builds on this model by helping local businesses offset logistical costs and make donations financially feasible.

This bill strengthens Rhode Island's existing framework, including Good Samaritan liability protections and current food recovery initiatives, by addressing the remaining financial barrier limiting participation at scale.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Committee to support House Bill 7698. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Claire Piron  
Food Security Team Brown Initiative for Policy Co-Lead

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### **Abbreviated version**

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Good evening, Chairwoman McEntee and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Claire Piron, and I am a student at Brown University and Co-Lead of the Food Security Team within the Brown Initiative for Policy, a student-led, non-partisan think tank that researches and advocates for sensible solutions to problems in our community.

I come before the Committee today to express my strong support for House Bill 7698.

Rhode Island continues to face significant food insecurity. Approximately 12.3% of residents are food insecure, representing over 120,000 people, and up to 38% of households, or 420,000 people, report difficulty consistently accessing adequate food. At the same time, thousands of tons of edible food are discarded annually across supply chains.

Food recovery organizations are also under sustained pressure. The Rhode Island Community Food Bank and partner agencies report rising demand, with over 80,000 residents relying on emergency food assistance each month during peak periods.

House Bill 7698 addresses a core barrier in the food recovery system: the cost of donation. Businesses often face labor, refrigeration, transportation, and coordination costs that make it cheaper to discard food than donate it. This bill responds by offering a tax credit equal to 75% of the fair market value of donated food, capped at \$5,000, reducing that financial barrier directly.

This is especially important for small Rhode Island businesses. For a local grocer, caterer, or family farm, this credit can be the difference between discarding surplus food and donating it consistently.

The bill also produces environmental benefits. Food waste is a major contributor to landfill methane emissions, and diverting edible food supports Rhode Island's climate goals under the Act on Climate.

There is also strong precedent for this approach. When federal tax incentives expanded in 2006, food donations increased significantly, with the strongest gains among small businesses that gained a viable financial pathway to donate surplus food.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Committee to support House Bill 7698. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Claire Piron  
Food Security Team Co-Lead, Brown Initiative for Policy