



April 28, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island Statehouse
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H7680 — EDUCATION EQUITY AND PROPERTY
TAX RELIEF ACT**

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for House Bill H7680, which would strengthen Rhode Island's early childhood education framework by explicitly adding programs for **three- and four-year-old children** to the state's categorical support for voluntary, free, high-quality pre-kindergarten and by directing the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to work with the Department of Human Services' childcare office and the Head Start collaboration office to recommend criteria for allocating these funds. This is a practical and important step toward expanding access to high-quality early learning for young children and families across Rhode Island.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public systems deliver measurable value. This includes centering **ALICE households** — Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed — families who are working and still priced out of stability by the high cost of living, including the basics, such as housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and technology. In Rhode Island, **39% of households are below the ALICE Threshold**, underscoring how many families have limited financial margin, and how essential affordable, high-quality early childhood opportunities are to both child development and family stability.

The evidence supporting this investment is strong. Research has consistently found that **high-quality preschool improves school readiness and early cognitive development**, especially for children in low-income and higher-risk environments, and federal research has long shown that high-quality pre-kindergarten can strengthen children's skills at school entry and improve later educational outcomes. Expanding earlier access, while also aligning state pre-K efforts with childcare and Head Start systems, is especially important for children, who benefit most from early developmental support, and for working families who need stable pathways into quality early learning.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill H7680. Strengthening access to high-quality pre-kindergarten for three-year-old and four-year-old children is a practical, equity-focused investment in school readiness, family stability, and Rhode Island's future.



Sincerely,

Elijah McLean
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United Way of Rhode Island