



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 H8163 — RHODE ISLAND PREKINDERGARTEN
EDUCATION 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 H8163, which would strengthen and expand Rhode Island's public prekindergarten system for three- and four-year-old children. The bill establishes a clear goal that no less than 70% of all three- and four-year-olds have access to high-quality prekindergarten through a mixed-delivery system that includes Head Start, local education agencies, licensed childcare centers, and family childcare providers.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way.** We support policies that strengthen household stability, expand opportunity, and ensure families have access to the services and systems they need to thrive. This includes centering ALICE households — those where members of the household are working, yet find themselves priced out of stability by the high cost of living. In Rhode Island, 39% of households are below the ALICE Threshold, making affordable, high-quality early learning essential for both child development and family stability.

H8163 is an important step toward building a stronger early childhood system. By aligning state pre-K, Head Start, childcare centers, and family childcare providers, the bill expands access while valuing the early learning infrastructure that already exists in communities across Rhode Island. A mixed-delivery approach gives families more options, supports providers, and helps ensure young children can enter kindergarten prepared to learn and succeed.

We also appreciate that H8163 recognizes the importance of quality and workforce stability. High-quality prekindergarten depends on skilled, supported, and fairly compensated educators. By requiring research-based standards and directing attention to competitive wages and benefits for pre-K teachers, this legislation addresses both access and the workforce needed to sustain it.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill H8163. Expanding high-quality prekindergarten for three- and four-year-old children is a practical investment in school readiness, family stability, workforce participation, and Rhode Island's long-term success.

Sincerely,



Elijah McLean
Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island