



May 12, 2026

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

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H7794 — THE RHODE ISLAND FAMILY HOME-VISITING 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 H7794, which would strengthen Rhode Island’s family home-visiting system by formally adding First Connections to the statute, improving annual reporting requirements, requiring the state to draw down the maximum available federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting funds, and directing Medicaid rate increases for family home-visiting services.

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 that public systems deliver measurable value. This includes centering ALICE households — Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed — households. ALICE families work, yet find themselves priced out of stability by the high cost of living basics, including housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology. For families facing economic hardship, early, voluntary, and community-based supports can be the difference between stability and crisis.

H7794 recognizes that a child’s earliest experiences lay the foundation for development, learning, and long-term success. Voluntary, high-quality home-visiting programs help families connect to essential resources, adjust to parenthood, build parenting skills, and address challenges commonly faced by young families. These supports are especially important for families navigating housing instability, nutrition needs, medical care, developmental concerns, and other challenges during pregnancy and a child’s earliest years.

The 2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook underscores the urgency of this investment. In 2025, Rhode Island had **9,476 births**, including **6,235 births that screened risk positive** and **4,192 births to low-income families**. Yet only **1,674 families received a First Connections visit**, and only **897 families were enrolled in evidence-based home visiting programs**. KIDS COUNT also reports that the number of families enrolled in First Connections declined **51% from October 1, 2021 to October 1, 2025**, while enrollment in long-term evidence-based home visiting programs remained **32% below 2021 levels**.

This legislation is also important because Rhode Island is not fully maximizing available federal home-visiting resources. Family home visiting programs depend on stable state investment,



Medicaid reimbursement, and federal MIECHV funding. When Rhode Island fails to draw down available federal dollars or when Medicaid rates do not support provider capacity, families lose access to programs that promote maternal and child health, early childhood development, family stability, and school readiness.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests your support for House Bill H7794. Strengthening family home visiting is a practical investment in young children, parents, and Rhode Island's early childhood system. By stabilizing funding, improving transparency, supporting providers, and maximizing federal dollars, Rhode Island can better serve young children and families when support matters most.

Sincerely,

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