



May 13, 2026

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

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 7319 — RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES -- THE RHODE ISLAND WORKS PROGRAM

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, I write in strong support of **House Bill 7319**, which would strengthen Rhode Island's child care system by eliminating the sunset on child care assistance for eligible child care educators and staff and modifying eligibility to better align with affordability standards.

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 and individuals who are working, yet still priced out of stability by the high cost of living. The ALICE framework recognizes that basic household needs include housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology. For many working families, child care is not optional; it is the infrastructure that makes employment, education, and economic mobility possible.

Child care educators and staff provide essential care that allows parents and caregivers to work, pursue training, and support their households. Yet too often, the very professionals who care for Rhode Island's children face affordability challenges in accessing child care for their own families. By continuing child care assistance for eligible child care educators and staff, this bill helps stabilize a critical workforce while supporting the families who depend on them.

This matters deeply for ALICE households. In Rhode Island, **39% of households are below the ALICE Threshold**, including **51,069 households in poverty** and **122,439 ALICE households** that earn above the federal poverty level but still cannot afford the basic cost of living. These families often face impossible tradeoffs between rent, utilities, food, transportation, health care, and child care. For workers in the child care sector, access to affordable child care can be the difference between remaining in the workforce and leaving a field that is already facing serious staffing pressures.

House Bill 7319 also supports the broader child care ecosystem. When child care educators and staff are better able to remain employed, programs are better positioned to maintain staffing, keep classrooms open, and provide reliable care for families. This strengthens family economic security, supports children's early development, and helps employers across sectors by ensuring



parents have access to consistent care. A strong child care system helps families work, helps children learn, and helps communities thrive. By eliminating the sunset on this important support and improving affordability for eligible child care educators and staff, H 7319 advances a more stable, equitable, and sustainable child care system for Rhode Island.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee to support **House Bill 7319**.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island