



May 14, 2026

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

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 7320 — CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we write in strong support of **House Bill 7320**, which would remove the requirement that families consent to and cooperate with the Department of Human Services in establishing paternity and enforcing child and medical support orders as a condition of eligibility for child care assistance. The bill would preserve families' ability to voluntarily access the Office of Child Support Services, while ensuring that this process does not become a barrier to child care assistance.

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, yet still cannot afford the basics of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology. In Rhode Island, **39% of households are below the ALICE Threshold**, meaning too many families have little margin to absorb additional administrative barriers or delays in accessing support.

H 7320 is a practical step toward improving access to child care assistance. Child care is essential infrastructure for working families. It allows parents and caregivers to work, pursue education or training, and maintain household stability. The **2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook** notes that child care is the largest living expense in most family budgets, and that nearly nine out of ten Rhode Island families cannot afford the average cost of child care for one infant.

The 2026 KIDS COUNT Factbook also provides important supporting context for this bill. As of December 1, 2025, **7,001 children with current or past participation in the Child Care Assistance Program had an active child support case** in the Rhode Island Office of Child Support Services system. KIDS COUNT further notes that Rhode Island is one of only a few states that requires participation in child support enforcement to qualify for a child care subsidy, that this requirement can be burdensome, and that there is no evidence it helps families access additional funds to improve financial security.

For ALICE families and low-income working families, the goal should be clear: reduce barriers to child care and affordability. H 7320 maintains access to child support services for families who



want that assistance, while removing a requirement that can complicate access to child care assistance when families need support most.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee to support **House Bill 7320**.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island