



## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Bill No.:** HB 7320  
**Primary Sponsors:** An Act Relating to Human Services – Rhode Island Works Program  
Representatives Diaz, Slater, Shallcross Smith, Donovan, Casimiro, Cruz,  
Kislak, Edwards, Felix, Tanzi  
**Committee:** House Committee on Finance  
**Date:** May 14, 2026

The Rhode Island Women’s Bar Association (“RIWBA”) supports this bill. RIWBA is a non-profit organization that promotes the advancement of the status of women in the State of Rhode Island and in the legal profession.

RIWBA supports this bill because it removes a significant and unnecessary barrier to accessing essential childcare for working families. By decoupling childcare assistance from mandatory cooperation with child support enforcement, this bill: (1) protects vulnerable parents and children; and (2) ensures the childcare assistance program can effectively fulfill its primary mission of supporting workforce participation.

The current statute requires parents seeking childcare assistance to cooperate with the state in establishing paternity and enforcing child support orders. While a “good cause” exception exists, the process can be daunting, invasive, and potentially dangerous for parents, particularly survivors of domestic violence who may not want to engage the child’s other parent for safety reasons. Forcing this choice can cause a chilling effect, discouraging eligible families from applying for the very assistance they need to work or attend school. The primary goal of childcare assistance —enabling parents to maintain employment — is undermined when it is conditioned on a separate and potentially harmful legal requirement.

This Act amends R.I. Gen. Laws § 40-5.2-20(d) to make cooperation with the office of child support services voluntary, rather than mandatory, for childcare assistance applicants. This is a critical change that prioritizes the immediate needs of children and their caretaker parents. It allows parents to access childcare assistance without fear of being forced into a potentially unsafe or unstable situation. It empowers parents to decide if and when to pursue child support, while ensuring that lack of child support enforcement does not become a barrier to employment.

Stable childcare is fundamental to the economic security of Rhode Island families, especially those headed by single mothers. This bill makes a simple, common-sense correction to the law that will have a profound and positive impact. It removes a punitive bureaucratic hurdle and rightly focuses the program on its intended purpose: helping parents work by ensuring their children have safe care.

The Rhode Island Women’s Bar Association views this bill as a crucial reform that enhances safety and economic stability for our state’s most vulnerable families. We urge your support for its passage.

**RIWBA contact: Legislative and Policy Committee Chair, Jennifer L. Sylvia, [riwomensbar@gmail.com](mailto:riwomensbar@gmail.com)**