

ANDREA CHAVEZ, MPH

Testimony Re: House Bill 7393

House Finance Committee

May 14, 2026

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[Mister Chairman or Madam Chairwoman] and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Andrea Chavez, and I am a Brown University Master of Public Health candidate. I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity.

To strongly urge your support for [House Bill 7393](#)- The Childcare is Essential Act, sponsored by Representative Diaz. This bill seeks to expand the Rhode Island Childcare Assistance Program's eligibility criteria to allow families at or below 85% of the state median ([\\$96,692 for a family of three](#)) income to apply and remain eligible until their income exceeds 100% of the state median ([\\$113,755 for a family of three](#)).

I am testifying for this bill for the mothers and parents who couldn't be here today. I was 23 years old when I found out I was pregnant during my first semester of grad school at Brown. Instead of enjoying my pregnancy, all I could think about was how I was going to finish my degree under a state system that does not adequately support working parents. I called childcare centers to join waitlists and paid hefty application fees at four months pregnant, only to find that there was no guarantee a spot would become available by the time my daughter was born. Not only that, but the average cost of infant care in [Rhode Island is one of the most expensive nationally at about \\$18,000 per year](#). Frustrated with trying to manage school, work, and my pregnancy, I decided to take two semesters off to figure out how best to approach finishing my degree. At times, I felt inclined to give up on my career, as many parents do. Yet, my mother decided to leave her job in Maryland to move to Rhode Island and provide childcare for me so that I could finish my degree. Thanks to her, I will be graduating next Saturday, May 23rd. Now, I am fighting for childcare for those who don't have that privilege, because unaffordable and inaccessible childcare creates barriers that begin even before a child is born, deterring career progression and financial growth.

Rhode Island's Child Care Assistance Program was designed to support working families, but due to limited funding and strict eligibility requirements, [only about 17% of eligible families](#)

[receive assistance](#). As a result, many families are forced to choose between their careers and reliable, quality care for their children. We shouldn't have to choose anymore.

The Childcare is Essential Act (H-7393) would expand eligibility to families earning up to 85% of the state's median income ([\\$96,692 for a family of three](#)) and allow for a gradual phase-out of benefits up until the family is earning 100% of the state's median income ([\\$113,755 for a family of three](#)), so families are not penalized for saying yes to a promotion or raise. Passing this legislation would allow Rhode Island to join the [15 other states](#) that have already raised the limit, including New York and Vermont. Further advancing access to comprehensive childcare programs, House Bill 7393 increases reimbursement rates for providers, which will help to stabilize the childcare workforce and expand available slots. Together, these changes improve affordability, access, and quality. **I urge you to continue to protect and expand access to the childcare subsidy program for Rhode Islanders by passing House Bill 7393. I can't emphasize enough that passing this bill will change the lives of working parents and children by allowing families access to high-quality, reliable childcare to allow parents to work, go to school, and give back to the community. Just like reliable, quality childcare has changed my life. Childcare is essential!**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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