



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 7393 — RHODE ISLAND CHILDCARE IS ESSENTIAL ACT

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 7393**, the **Rhode Island Childcare Is Essential Act**, which would strengthen access to affordable, high-quality child care for Rhode Island families while supporting the child care workforce and improving the stability of the state's child care system.

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 remain priced out of financial 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 working families, child care is not optional. It is essential infrastructure that allows parents and caregivers to work, pursue education and training, and provide stability for their households. When child care is unavailable or unaffordable, families face impossible choices: reduce work hours, leave the workforce, delay education, or sacrifice other basic needs to pay for care.

H 7393 directly responds to that challenge by expanding eligibility for child care assistance to families with incomes at or below **85% of the state median income** and ensuring that family copayments do not exceed **7% of income**. This aligns Rhode Island with federal affordability guidance and recognizes the reality that many working families earn too much to qualify for some forms of assistance but still cannot afford the true cost of child care.

This matters deeply for ALICE families. United For ALICE reports that **39% of Rhode Island households are below the ALICE Threshold**, including **51,069 households in poverty** and **122,439 ALICE households** — families who work, contribute, and still cannot afford the basic cost of living. For these households, the cost of child care can destabilize an already fragile budget and force tradeoffs between care, rent, food, transportation, utilities, and health care.



H 7393 also recognizes that a strong child care system depends on a stable child care workforce. The bill includes support for eligible child care educators and staff, acknowledging that the professionals caring for Rhode Island’s children often face the same affordability challenges as the families they serve. Supporting child care workers helps reduce turnover, keep classrooms open, and strengthen the continuity of care that children and families need.

The bill’s reimbursement rate provisions are also essential. By updating rates to reflect the most recent market rate survey and requiring rates to meet or exceed the federal equal access benchmark, H 7393 helps ensure that providers can participate in the child care assistance program while maintaining quality and supporting their workforce. Without adequate reimbursement, providers are forced to absorb unsustainable costs, limit subsidized slots, or close classrooms — all of which reduce access for families.

House Bill 7393 is a practical investment in children, families, workers, and the broader economy. It supports parents’ labor force participation, advances early childhood development, strengthens the child care workforce, and helps Rhode Island build a child care system that reflects the true needs of working families.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee to support **House Bill 7393**.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island