



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Bill No.: HB 7393
An Act Relating to Human Services – Rhode Island Childcare is Essential Act

Primary Sponsors: Representatives Diaz, Slater, Shallcross Smith, Tanzi, Giraldo, Kislak, Casimiro, Cruz, Edwards

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: (1) expands access to affordable childcare; and (2) provides fair and appropriate wages to childcare workers to promote their retention in a market that needs them.

A fundamental need for families is affordable quality childcare. In light of the disproportional share of family budgets that quality childcare demands, some relief must be made available for Rhode Island families so that parents may pursue livelihoods. Countless women especially, report making barely enough to cover childcare costs alone. This situation is unsustainable for women and all parents to promote and realize healthy families.

This Act would update and consolidate two (2) sections of the Rhode Island Works statute that governs the Rhode Island Childcare Assistance Program, the state's childcare subsidy program, into a new statute: The Rhode Island Childcare is Essential Act.

The Act also increases the tiered rates paid for licensed childcare centers to meet or exceed the federal equal access benchmark for all age groups. Rates must provide low-income families with equal access to the childcare market.

It is important to note that in 2025, twenty (20) states met or exceeded this equal access standard including neighboring states MA, NH, NY and VT.

The new statute expands eligibility to meet the federal eligibility benchmark to include families with incomes at or below eighty-five percent (85%) of the state median income.

The current federal guideline for affordability is that families should pay no more than seven percent (7%) of family income for childcare. Rhode Island families face some of the highest childcare costs in the US, with average expenses often consuming 23% to over 27% of household income. This significantly exceeds the 7% threshold deemed affordable by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Infant care alone can cost roughly 17.7% of the median household income.

RIWBA views this bill as critically important to the health of RI families. Especially in light of federal mandates and the status of law and policy in neighboring states, without this bill, it will become even more difficult for RI to attract, offer and retain quality affordable childcare for RI families who will suffer owing to scarcity and costs. The Rhode Island Women's Bar Association urges your support for its passage.

RIWBA contact: Legislative and Policy Committee Chair, Jennifer L. Sylvia, riwomensbar@gmail.com