



RE: Testimony in support of H7393—RI Childcare is Essential Act

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide **testimony in strong support of House Bill 7393**. We are writing to advocate for this critical policy as a tool not only to reduce child poverty but also to strengthen family safety and support survivors of domestic and family violence. H7393 would ...

For 50 years, Sojourner House, a non-profit based in Providence but now providing services across the state, has served thousands of victims and survivors of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and human trafficking. We offer wraparound services such as support groups, emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing, sexual health advocacy, and emotional support. We believe that everyone deserves a safe, healthy home, and proudly house all genders.

Rhode Island has the highest child poverty rate in New England, with more than 32,000 children living below the federal poverty line in 2024.^{i,ii,iii} Survivors of domestic violence are disproportionately impacted by poverty, housing instability, trauma, and economic abuse, making access to affordable childcare critical to their safety and long-term stability.^{iv}

Domestic violence survivors often face significant barriers navigating public benefit systems. Extensive documentation requirements, rigid work rules, repeated recertifications, and interactions with child support enforcement can discourage survivors from seeking assistance or place them at greater risk. Rhode Island already recognizes the intersection of domestic violence and public benefits through programs such as the *Family Violence Option Advocacy Program*. Expanding and simplifying childcare assistance through H7393 is consistent with a trauma-informed approach because it reduces barriers that can prevent survivors from accessing safe childcare, maintaining employment, and rebuilding independence.

For many survivors, childcare is a prerequisite to safety. Survivors may be unable to leave abusive relationships without reliable childcare to work, attend court hearings, meet with attorneys, participate in counseling, secure housing, or pursue education and job training. Domestic violence agencies routinely see abusers use financial control and caregiving responsibilities to maintain power over survivors.^{v,vi} Increasing access to childcare assistance helps survivors achieve economic independence and safely separate from abusive partners.

Children exposed to domestic violence also benefit from stable, high-quality childcare environments. Safe childcare settings can provide consistency, developmental support, trauma-informed relationships, and early identification of behavioral or emotional concerns. H7393 recognizes the importance of high-quality childcare in supporting healthy child development and strengthening family stability.

For survivors of domestic violence, childcare is not a convenience but is infrastructure for safety and recovery. H7393 would strengthen survivor autonomy, child wellbeing, and long-term family stability across Rhode Island. We respectfully urge the Committee to support H7393 this session.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

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- ⁱ Castro, A. (18 Sept, 2025). More Rhode Island children lived in poverty in 2024, new data shows. Rhode Island Current. <https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2025/09/18/more-rhode-island-children-lived-in-poverty-in-2024-new-data-shows/>
- ⁱⁱ Rhode Island Kids Count (11 Sept 2025). New census estimates show RI ranked 33rd in child poverty. <https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/9.25-Census-Data-media-alert-final.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Rhode Island Kids Count (2024). 2024 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT factbook. <https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2024-Rhode-Island-KIDS-COUNT-Factbook.pdf>
- ^{iv} Bonomi, A. E., Trabert, B., Anderson, M. L., Kernic, M. A., & Holt, V. L. (2014). Intimate partner violence and neighborhood income: A longitudinal analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 20(1), 42-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801213520580>
- ^v Fanning, P. (n.d.). Recognizing financial abuse: A growing weapon in intimate partner violence. University of Maryland School of Social Work. <https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/fall-2024-connections/alumni-and-faculty-making-an-impact-in-ipv/recognizing-financial-abuse-a-growing-weapon-in-intimate-partner-violence-/>
- ^{vi} National Network to End Domestic Violence (n.d.). About financial abuse. <https://nnedv.org/content/about-financial-abuse/>