



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 7689 — RHODE ISLAND WORKS PROGRAM**

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for House Bill H7689, which would strengthen the Rhode Island Works Program by allowing lawful permanent residents to receive benefits without a waiting period, increasing the monthly cash benefit to 100% of the federal poverty level, tying benefit levels to the federal poverty level moving forward, increasing the child support pass-through, and removing the \$65 benefit reduction for families living in subsidized housing.

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. ALICE households (where members of the household are working, yet find themselves priced out of stability by the high cost of living). The ALICE framework defines basic needs as housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare, and technology. For families facing economic hardship, access to cash assistance can be the difference between stability and crisis.

H7689 is a practical investment in children and family stability. RI Works is fundamentally a children's program: in December 2024, **6,388 children under age 18 were enrolled in RI Works, and 68% of all RI Works beneficiaries were children**. Yet the maximum monthly benefit for a family of three is only **\$865 per month**, representing just **41% of the federal poverty threshold**. Raising benefits to 100% of the federal poverty level would help families better afford basic necessities like food, housing, utilities, transportation, diapers, and school supplies.

We also support the bill's changes to child support pass-throughs and subsidized housing policy. Child support is intended to support children, but Rhode Island currently allows families receiving RI Works to receive only the first \$50 of monthly child support paid to the custodial parent. H7689 would allow more of those dollars to reach children directly. The bill would also eliminate the \$65 benefit reduction for families in subsidized housing, recognizing that housing assistance does not eliminate the cost of food, transportation, childcare, medicine, utilities, and other household needs.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill H7689. Strengthening Rhode Island Works is a direct investment in children, family economic security, and household stability. By modernizing benefits, allowing more child support to reach children, and removing



unnecessary barriers, Rhode Island can better support families working to meet basic needs and build a stronger future.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean  
Manager, Government Relations & Policy  
United Way of Rhode Island