



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: House Bill 7690 - The Rhode Island Works Program: Child Support Pass-Through

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 7690 and thank Representative Handy for sponsoring and Representatives Stewart, Alzate, Slater, Kislak, Kazarian, Caldwell, Giraldo, Ajello, and Batista for co-sponsoring. This bill would amend the Rhode Island Works Program to increase the child support pass-through payment to \$100 for one child and \$200 for two or more children, ensuring that more child support dollars reach the families who need them most.

Child support is a critical resource for low-income families and plays a key role in reducing child poverty. As a federal requirement of receiving cash assistance using TANF funds, recipients must cooperate to establish a child support order for the non-custodial parent. Currently in Rhode Island, only the first \$50 of current monthly child support payments is passed through to custodial parents enrolled in RI Works — with the remainder retained by the state as cost-recovery for cash assistance. This is particularly striking given that Rhode Island does not contribute any general revenue funds toward RI Works cash assistance, yet continues to benefit from child support cost-recovery, with those funds deposited into the state's general revenue fund.

During the Fiscal Federal Year 2025, the state collected \$1.7 million in child support for custodial parents receiving RI Works benefits and distributed \$444,884 to families. On average, 384 families received a pass-through payment each month. **Increasing the pass-through to \$100 for one child and \$200 for two or more children would have resulted in an additional \$594,800 in support for families.**

The federal government offers states flexibility to pass through up to \$100 for one child and \$200 for two or more children in current support to families each month without having to repay the federal government its share of those payments.

In 2017, Colorado implemented a full current support pass-through, meaning all current child support paid goes directly to the custodial parent, with none withheld by the state. Illinois followed in 2024. In Maryland, families receive up to \$100 for one child and up to \$200 for two or more children. Rhode Island should not lag behind.

Child support is among the most direct and immediate sources of income available to low-income custodial parents, the majority of whom are mothers. For a family already stretched thin, an extra \$50 to \$150 a month can mean the difference between keeping the lights on and falling behind.



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Ensuring families receive more of the support owed to them reduces financial stress, helps parents meet their children's essential needs — including housing, school supplies, and clothing. Research shows that increasing the amount of child support passed through to families is associated with increased collections and can reduce child poverty. This is a targeted, evidence-based intervention that puts more money directly into the hands of families who have already done everything asked of them.

Rhode Island has an opportunity to be a leader in family-centered child support policy. Increasing the pass-through is consistent with our state's values of equity and economic opportunity for children and families. We urge the committee to move HB 7690 forward and ensure that more of the child support dollars collected on behalf of Rhode Island's children actually reach the children they are meant to support.

We respectfully urge the committee to support HB 7690 and continue investing in policies that strengthen the economic security and well-being of Rhode Island's children and families.

Thank you for your consideration.