



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

25 Howard Avenue, Louis Pasteur Building 57 Cranston, RI 02920
(401) 462-2121

Office of the Director

Kimberly Merolla-Brito

May 14, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney,
Chair, House Committee on Finance
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H8176 – An Act Relating to Human Services – The Rhode Island Works

Dear Chair Abney,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS), I am writing to express support for House Bill 8176. This proposed bill would add a protective services category to the eligibility of child care assistance, which includes foster or kinship children served through the Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

The provisions outlined in this bill closely align with DHS's mission to enhance the health, safety, and well-being of Rhode Island families. By establishing a protective services category in statute, DHS will be able to serve children and families more effectively, streamline service delivery, and address critical gaps in supporting children involved in or at risk of involvement with the foster care system through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).

This proposed bill represents an important step toward supporting all children in Rhode Island. Establishing a protective services category ensures that at-risk children can access child care services regardless of whether their parents meet traditional eligibility criteria, such as work or income requirements. This approach aligns federal CCDF policy with broader child welfare efforts by promoting placement stability, reducing the likelihood of unnecessary removal from the home, and supporting family reunification.

Children in high-risk situations derive significant benefit from access to structured, nurturing environments. High-quality, child care programs support cognitive and social development, promote emotional stability, and provide consistent routines for children during periods of family disruption. Federal guidance under CCDF also encourages states to prioritize services for children in protective services or those at risk of abuse or neglect. Codifying this category in statute advances compliance with federal expectations and aligns with reauthorization priorities that emphasize child safety and well-being.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla Brito".

Kimberly Merolla Brito
Director

RI Department of Human Service

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance
The Honorable Jenni A. Furtado
Danica Iacoi, Chief of Staff
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy