



Rhode Island
LEGAL SERVICES
50 CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS
Since 1969

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2026 – H 7644

SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM FINANCIAL STABILITY OF RHODE ISLAND LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

April 16, 2026



Rhode Island
LEGAL SERVICES

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April 16, 2026

Representative Carol Hagan McEntee
House Judiciary Committee, Chair
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Room 313
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Letter in support of 2026 – H 7644

Dear Chairperson McEntee:

Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc. strongly supports the passage of House Bill H 7644. If enacted, H 7644 would amend G.L. 1956 Sections 9-29-1, 9-29-18, and 9-29-19 to increase funds to RILS offset by a small increase in filing fees across the District Court, Family Court, and Superior Court.

With the projected increase, RILS is expected to receive \$480,000 this calendar year. Last year, RILS received \$325,000 from filing fees. The Rhode Island Judiciary does not retain any of the fees that the unified judicial system is legally obligated to collect.

RILS provides essential legal services to many vulnerable communities in Rhode Island, including hardworking low-income residents, victims of domestic violence, the elderly, and Veterans.

Thank you, Chairperson McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee, for considering House Bill H 7644. Also, thank you to Representatives Felix, Batista, Knight, McEntee, Dawson, Ajello, Noret, Cruz, Place, and Kazarian for introducing this important legislation. Thousands of families and children benefit from the legal assistance we provide.

Importantly, this small increase does not negatively impact the budget.

Sincerely,

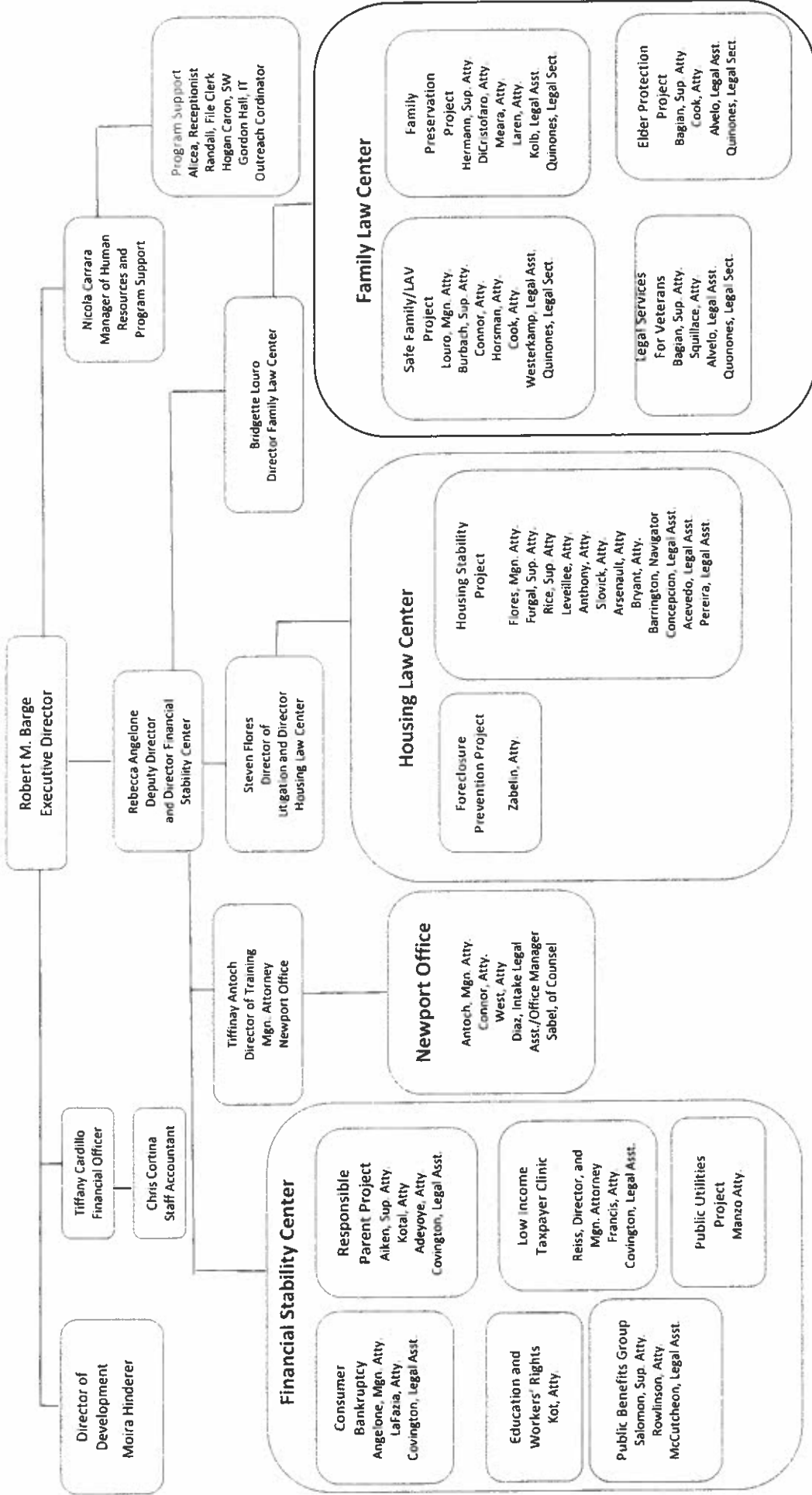

Robert M. Barge
Executive Director

CLOSED CASES

Program or Workgroup	2024	2025
Consumer Debt:	173	208
Family Law:	663	913
Education:	45	43
Employment:	152	151
Health:	158	132
Housing:	2,179	2,355
Income Maintenance:	364	397
Juvenile:	389	292
Individual Rights:	33	21
Miscellaneous:	7	9
Volunteer Lawyer Program:	151	77
Total	4,314	4,598

Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc.
2025 Organizational Chart

Revised February 2026



THE RHODE ISLAND LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

2026 Programs and Priorities

The 2026 Program Priorities are listed below:

Safe Affordable Housing

Income Maintenance and Food

A Healthy Community

Family Preservation and Safety

Financial Stability

High Quality Appropriate Education

Employment, and Workers' Rights

2026 PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

FAMILY LAW CENTER

ELDER PROTECTION PROJECT (EPP)

The Elder Protection Project (EPP) provides specialized, high-quality legal assistance to protect elder residents of Rhode Island victimized by physical and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, neglect, and abandonment.

The EPP's goals and objectives are: 1) provide direct legal assistance to protect seniors from physical and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, neglect, and abandonment; 2) increase access to legal aid for seniors by embedding an attorney at the Rhode Island Division of Elderly Affairs; 3) provide social work services to victims; 4) provide outreach to underserved and special populations of elder victims including Native Americans, Latinas, and Southeast Asians to describe the direct services available and how to obtain assistance.

FAMILY PRESERVATION PROJECT (FPP)

Rhode Island Legal Services' Family Preservation Project is an integral component of the Rhode Island Family Court's child welfare system. The project's attorneys represent parents facing the involuntary termination of parental rights or allegations of abuse, neglect, or dependency brought by the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families.

Representation is tailored to the individual facts and legal strength of each case. It may include a probable-cause hearing, a full evidentiary trial, and/or post-finding reviews. In many cases, negotiated settlements are reached, and service plans are put in place for the parents involved in the system. These cases are heard before the Family Court and, in certain situations, before the Rhode Island Supreme Court.

SAFE FAMILY PROJECT (SFP)

The project attorneys provide legal representation in Domestic Abuse Restraining Orders cases. Depending on the facts of the case, when appropriate, the Safe Family Project advocates refer clients to RILS' Financial Stability Center or Housing Law Center for additional assistance with ongoing issues.

The primary focus of the Project is to promote the safety of families by providing advice, referrals, and/or representation to victims of domestic violence in Family Court restraining orders, custody, and divorce cases.

LEGAL SERVICES FOR VETERANS PROJECT (LSV)

Rhode Island Legal Services, Inc., pursuant to 38 CFR § 79.15, provides eligible Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with comprehensive legal assistance in a variety of matters, including child support, divorce and custody, bankruptcy, housing, collections, public benefits, expungement, employment, and tax. The Legal Services for Veterans Project will dramatically increase the number of Veterans receiving legal assistance to prevent homelessness. The Project will further prevent unnecessary and/or illegal evictions from public and subsidized housing, provide legal assistance to tenants of foreclosed properties, and gain additional time for families facing homelessness to find new housing before being forced to leave their apartment.

FINANCIAL STABILITY CENTER

CONSUMER DEBT PROJECT (CDP)

The Consumer Debt practice represents clients in matters that significantly affect their economic situation and financial stability. The Group practices before various administrative and judicial forums, including the Rhode Island District Court, the Bankruptcy Court, and the Department of Labor and Training. Consumer law issues are increasingly prevalent among the low-income and elderly communities served by Rhode Island Legal Services.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROJECT (EEP)

RILS represents parents and students on a range of educational and employment issues, including wage claims and unemployment compensation cases. The EEP provides advocacy and client representation to improve the quality of public education for low-income students and to enable families to address their public education problems, including inappropriate education, special education, bilingual and vocational education, and school discipline and residency issues.

LOW INCOME TAXPAYER CLINIC (LITC)

The Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) is designed to meet the needs of low-income Rhode Islanders who are experiencing difficulties with the IRS. RILS assists low-income Rhode Island taxpayers, including those for whom English is a second language, in obtaining fair and equitable treatment in disputes with the Internal Revenue Service and favorable resolution of their controversies with the IRS.

The LITC clinic comprises two components. The outreach component focuses on education for those for whom English is a second language. The second component of the program is a controversy component focused on audits and representation in tax court and collection cases involving the Earned Income Tax Credit.

PUBLIC BENEFITS GROUP (PBU)

The Public Benefits Group provides legal assistance to prevent the loss of a client's income and to obtain and preserve Medical Assistance (MA) and Medicaid benefits for eligible clients. The Public Benefits Group also provides community advocacy and client representation before administrative tribunals and appellate courts regarding denials or terminations of government benefits.

Thousands of Rhode Islanders rely on Rhode Island Works, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, General Public Assistance (GPA), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Social Security benefits, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). It is important that we continue to provide legal support to low-income clients so that we can preserve their income, enabling them to purchase basic necessities such as food and clothing and to access proper health care.

RESPONSIBLE PARENT PROJECT (RPP)

Rhode Island Legal Services' Responsible Parent Project plays an important role in the Rhode Island Family Court by representing parents threatened with incarceration for failure to pay court-ordered child support. The project's focus remains on helping parents meet their child support obligations in a manner that is fair and equitable to all parties. Defendants facing incarceration as a result of a Motion to Adjudge in Contempt in the area of child support who cannot afford an attorney are referred to the Responsible Parent Project for full legal representation.

HOUSING LAW CENTER

HOUSING STABILITY PROJECT (HSP)

The Housing Stability Project is an effective effort to help low-income Rhode Islanders maintain housing by providing high-quality legal assistance in eviction cases in the Rhode Island District Courts, educating clients about their legal rights, and providing written materials and forms to help low-income individuals advocate for themselves. To efficiently handle the high volume of calls from people with housing problems, RILS uses an online intake system that gives those with serious housing problems quick access to an experienced attorney or paralegal to address their legal issues immediately. If the problem can be resolved through counsel and advice rather than litigation, RILS' experienced HSP staff provides that assistance.

FORECLOSURE PREVENTION PROJECT

RILS' Foreclosure Project staff also represent tenants affected by foreclosure; educate borrowers and tenants who reside in foreclosed properties about their legal rights; and help develop new initiatives to keep defaulting borrowers and tenants in their homes. The Project undertakes a broad spectrum of legal activities to assist borrowers impacted by the foreclosure crisis and to bring impact litigation challenging unlawful foreclosure, origination, and servicing practices. Furthermore, the staff of the Foreclosure Prevention Project litigate common mortgage-related issues and use bankruptcy as an additional strategy for home preservation. Major pre- and post-foreclosure impact litigation, in collaboration with the National Consumer Law Center, the nation's leading experts on foreclosure issues, is envisioned.

PRIVATE ATTORNEY INVOLVEMENT

VOLUNTEER LAWYER PROGRAM (VLP)

Rhode Island Legal Services spends an amount equal to at least 12.5% of its Legal Services Corporation Basic Field Grant on private attorney involvement, sub-granting IOLTA funds to the Rhode Island Bar Association to administer the Volunteer Lawyer Program (VLP). The purpose of the VLP is to provide pro bono legal assistance to those who cannot obtain representation on their own or through other agencies, and to increase private attorneys' involvement in delivering legal assistance to the poor.

OUTREACH AND DISASTER RESPONSE

An outreach effort targeted at underserved communities, especially those facing additional barriers to obtaining civil legal assistance. RILS will operate a mobile outreach office to make legal services more accessible for clients. It will also be crucial during any disaster to bring legal services directly to the communities in need.

2026 -- H 7644

LC005055

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEDURE -- PROCEDURE GENERALLY -- FEES

Introduced By: Representatives Felix, Batista, Knight, McEntee, Dawson, Ajello, Noret, Cruz, Place, and Kazarian
Date Introduced: February 11, 2026

Referred To: House Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Sections 9-29-1, 9-29-18 and 9-29-19 of the General Laws in Chapter 9-29 entitled "Fees" are hereby amended to read as follows:

9-29-1. District court fees.

(a) Every district court shall be allowed the following fees, in full, to be taxed in the bill of costs in every civil action:

- (1) For the entry of every small claim \$55.00 75.00.
(2) For the entry of every other action \$80.00 100.00.
(3) For every writ of execution \$20.00 40.00.

(b) In addition to the fees set forth herein, the district court shall apply a technology surcharge assessed in accordance with § 8-15-11.

(c) Provided, that five dollars (~~\$5.00~~) twenty dollars (\$20.00) of the fee for the entry of every action in subdivision (a)(1) or (a)(2) or writ in subdivision (a)(3) shall be forwarded to Rhode Island Legal Services.

1 (b) In addition to the fees set forth in subsection (a) of this section, the superior court shall
2 apply a technology surcharge on all filing fees assessed in accordance with § 8-15-11.

3 (c) Provided, that ~~ten dollars (\$10.00)~~ twenty dollars (\$20.00) of the fee for the entry of
4 every civil action or petition shall be forwarded to Rhode Island Legal Services.

5 **9-29-19. Family court fees.**

6 (a) The family court shall be allowed the following fees in full to be taxed in the bill of
7 costs in every domestic relations or other civil proceeding:

8 (1) For the entry of every petition, complaint, or action ~~\$120.00~~ 130.00.

9 (2) For every writ of execution ~~\$40.00~~ 50.00.

10 (b) In addition to the fees as set forth herein, the family court shall apply a technology
11 surcharge fee assessed in accordance with § 8-15-11.

12 (c) Provided, ~~ten dollars (\$10.00)~~ twenty dollars (\$20.00) of the fee for the entry of every
13 petition, complaint or action shall be forwarded to Rhode Island Legal Services.

14 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEDURE -- PROCEDURE GENERALLY -- FEES

- 1 This act would increase the fees charged for filings and writs of execution in the district
- 2 court, superior court and family court.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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