

# AFFORDABLE

## RHODE ISLAND

Testimony in Support of H7769  
House Committee on Labor  
March 17, 2026

Chairman Solomon and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Affordable RI, a coalition dedicated to ensuring that every Rhode Islander can afford to live, work, and thrive in the state they call home. We are here today in strong support of H7769, which would increase the state's minimum wage to \$20.00 per hour by January 1, 2027.

While Rhode Island has made incremental progress in raising the wage floor, the economic reality on the ground has outpaced our policy. The current trajectory—reaching \$16.00 this year and \$18.00 in 2028, is no longer a "living" wage. To maintain a stable economy and a healthy workforce, we must bridge the gap between what workers earn and what life actually costs.

### The Math of Survival: The Two-Thirds Gap

According to the **MIT Living Wage Calculator**, the updated living wage for a single adult with no children in Rhode Island is now **\$25.01 per hour**.<sup>1</sup> This figure represents the bare minimum required to cover basic necessities: housing, food, transportation, and healthcare, without any government assistance or discretionary spending.

Currently, a worker earning **\$16.00 per hour is earning roughly two-thirds of what is required to survive**. This creates an "overtime trap." To bridge the gap between \$16.00 and the \$25.00 survival line, a Rhode Islander must work **62.5 hours every single week** just to achieve baseline stability. We are effectively mandating a 60-hour work week for our lowest earners, leaving them with no time for rest, education, or community engagement.

### The Punishment of Working Parents

The situation for families is even more staggering. **For a single parent with one child in Rhode Island, the living wage is \$45.48 per hour**.<sup>2</sup>

**Even with two working adults and two children, each parent must earn \$31.13 per hour to make ends meet.**

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<sup>1</sup> Glasmeier, Amy K. *Living Wage Calculator - Living Wage Calculation for Rhode Island*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), 2024/2025 Data Update. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/44>.

<sup>2</sup> Glasmeier, Amy K. *Living Wage Calculator - Living Wage Calculation for Rhode Island*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), 2024/2025 Data Update. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/44>.

When we keep the minimum wage so far below the cost of living, we are essentially "punishing" parents for choosing essential service work. These parents are forced into double shifts and multiple jobs, meaning they are frequently absent from their children's lives. Data from **RI KIDS COUNT highlights that 51% of Rhode Island renters are cost-burdened**, spending over a third of their income on housing alone.<sup>3</sup> When wages don't cover rent, the first things to be sacrificed are time with family and the developmental stability of our children.

## Caring for the Caregivers

H7769 is particularly vital for our "essential" workforce—direct service workers, home care aides, and childcare providers. These individuals perform the most critical labor in our society: caring for our elderly and educating our youth.

It is a bitter irony that a home care worker in Rhode Island, who provides life-sustaining care to others, often cannot afford the basics of life for themselves. Many of these workers rely on the very social safety nets they help others navigate. As of 2025, nearly **38% of Rhode Island households are food insecure—the highest rate in the state's history**.<sup>4</sup> We cannot continue to build our state's care infrastructure on the backs of workers who are forced to go hungry.

## The Urgency of Now

Opponents of this bill will argue that \$20.00 is too much, too fast. However, by 2027, \$20.00 an hour will still fall short of the MIT-calculated living wage for a single person. This bill is not an "increase" in the traditional sense; it is an **emergency adjustment** to help people in crisis and prevent the total collapse of our health and service workforce in the coming years.

If we want a Rhode Island where people can afford to live where they work, where parents can see their children, and where "essential work" is treated with dignity, we must pass H7769.

We urge the Committee to pass this important legislation to provide the opportunity for a more stable life possible when earning a living wage.

Respectfully submitted,



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<sup>3</sup> Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. *2024 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*.  
<https://www.rikidscount.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Rhode Island Community Food Bank. *2024 Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island*.  
<https://rifoodbank.org/hunger-in-ri/>.