



Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

**Testimony in Support of 26-H 7770,
AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS - MINIMUM WAGES
House Committee on Labor
Hannah Stern - Director, Public Policy and Government Relations
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
March 18, 2026**

Dear Chair Corvese and honorable members of the House Committee on Labor:

In my capacity as the Director, Public Policy and Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE), I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony **in support of House Bill 7770**. PPSNE provided sexual and reproductive health care to nearly 10,000 Rhode Island patients last year and believes all people should have access to quality, affordable, and compassionate health care as a basic human right — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or your immigration status.

Reproductive freedom includes economic security for all, which in turn ensures greater access to housing, education, and, critically, health care services. Every person deserves the right to a livable wage to care for themselves and their family with dignity. However, the current affordability crisis is a significant impediment to Rhode Islanders' achievement of the true autonomy and self-determination that is central to reproductive freedom. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, an individual in Rhode Island must earn *over \$30 dollars an hour* to afford a two-bedroom rental in our state. Even though Rhode Island has made important steps to seek greater economic equity for residents, our current \$16 minimum wage unfortunately still leaves far too many people behind as housing, product, gas, and other prices continue to soar.

Especially for women, who often serve as the primary caregivers in families and thus face greater economic insecurity if they leave and re-enter the workforce, this bill would provide that any gaps in employment due to caregiving responsibilities do not dramatically impact someone's earning potential and their ability to financially provide for their families and themselves. The National Women's Law Center reports that, in Rhode Island, working

women are 1.9 times as likely to have a low-wage job compared to a working man¹, and we know that these disparities not only persist but *increase* for Black and Brown working women. To effectively take steps to address both gender and racial pay gaps, and to promote the economic mobility of women and caregivers, this legislation is necessary.

From the experience of our patients, Planned Parenthood understands that when life becomes less affordable, people must make difficult decisions about financially prioritizing certain resources, including preventive health care services. Especially with profound federal cuts to Medicaid, and the lack of renewal of the Affordable Care Act's enhanced premium tax credit program for health insurance, more Rhode Islanders are being forced to reassess their ability to access necessary health care and health care coverage. Planned Parenthood is proud to provide services to all of our patients, regardless of their income or insurance, and, in fact, after being blocked from federal Medicaid reimbursement for preventive services after the passage of H.R. 1 last July, has absorbed the cost of preventive care for the 23% of our RI patients who have Medicaid as their insurance. But the current system for both health care and health services is unsustainable and requires both state policy changes and significant investment in economic equity for all communities. This legislation will ensure that Rhode Islanders can continue to access the resources they need, and that community organizations can continue to provide these fundamental services.

Planned Parenthood will continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure that our patients and our communities have what they need to live healthy and self-determined lives. H 7770 is a critical step in ensuring that all Rhode Islanders have the economic security and financial mobility to access the health care that they deserve and would allow families to thrive instead of barely survive.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.



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¹ <https://nwlc.org/resource/interactive-map-women-and-men-low-wage-workforce/>

