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June 2, 2026

The Honorable Arthur Corvese
Chairman, House Committee on Labor
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman Corvese and Members of the Committee:

The Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce (NRICC) represents businesses located in Burrillville, Central Falls, Cumberland, Foster, Glocester, Johnston, Lincoln, North Providence, North Smithfield, Pawtucket, Scituate, Smithfield, and Woonsocket. On behalf of our members, we respectfully oppose H.8578, An Act Relating to Human Services – Family Caregivers Support Act of 2013.

The Chamber recognizes the important role family caregivers play in supporting children, aging parents, and family members with disabilities or health challenges. Employers across Rhode Island already strive to provide flexibility whenever possible because they understand that supporting employees often strengthens retention and workplace morale. However, H.8578 goes far beyond preventing discrimination and would impose broad new legal obligations that create uncertainty, increase liability exposure, and significantly interfere with an employer's ability to manage its workforce and operations.

The bill would make it unlawful for an employer to fail to hire an individual solely because of family caregiver responsibilities and would require employers to provide accommodations related to caregiving obligations. While these goals may appear reasonable in principle, the legislation creates expansive and subjective standards that are likely to generate disputes and litigation.

Of particular concern is the bill's requirement that employers provide accommodations such as flexible scheduling, adjusted work hours, remote work arrangements, or other workplace modifications unless the employer can demonstrate that doing so would create an "undue hardship." Unlike accommodations required under disability laws, family caregiving responsibilities encompass an extremely broad range of circumstances that may change frequently and be difficult to verify or administer consistently.

Many businesses, particularly small and mid-sized employers, operate in industries where employee presence during specific hours is essential. Manufacturing facilities, retail establishments, restaurants, healthcare providers, construction firms, and service-based businesses cannot always accommodate requests for modified schedules or remote work without



disrupting operations, reducing productivity, increasing costs, or placing additional burdens on co-workers. H.8578 effectively shifts the burden to employers to justify routine staffing decisions and workplace requirements.

The Chamber is also concerned that the bill invites substantial legal exposure by granting enforcement authority to the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights. Under H.8578, employers could face investigations, administrative proceedings, orders for reinstatement, back pay awards, compensation for lost benefits, attorney's fees, and other remedies. Even when an employer acts in good faith, defending against such claims can require significant expenditures of time and resources.

Although the legislation provides an affirmative defense for employers with fewer than twenty-five employees if they maintain a "reasonable" phased-in compliance plan, the bill does not clearly define what constitutes reasonable compliance. This ambiguity creates additional uncertainty for small businesses and may ultimately require employers to seek legal guidance simply to determine whether they are meeting their obligations.

The Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce believes employers should retain the flexibility to work collaboratively with employees to address caregiving needs on a case-by-case basis without the threat of costly litigation or government intervention. Existing workplace policies, combined with market-driven efforts to attract and retain employees, are better suited to addressing these issues than a broad statutory mandate.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose the passage of H.8578.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Monika Zuluaga".

Monika P. Zuluaga, President & CEO