



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

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Office of the Director

Kimberly Merolla-Brito

February 11, 2026

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey
Chair, House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H7371 – An Act Relating to Towns and Cities – Zoning Ordinances

Dear Chair Casey,

I am writing to you in strong support of H7371, a bill that would amend the municipal zoning ordinance in relation to zoning statewide for family child care homes. As the director who oversees all licensing and oversight of child care assistance and licensing laws for the state, I am sharing additional information for the committee's consideration.

The proposed bill, H7371, seeks to amend the statewide zoning standard that would allow family child care providers to provide care for no more than 12 children at a time, in alignment with state and federal rules and regulations. Family child care providers across the state provide an essential service for working families by providing high-quality care for children, and often providing flexible hours as well as culturally familiar settings for families of diverse backgrounds.

Passage of H7371 would establish a consistent statewide zoning standard for family child care providers; ensure greater uniformity of state regulations across municipalities that also supports planning purposes; reduce barriers for family-based providers; and improve access to child care for families where available child care seats are scarcer. Improved access to child care has also historically helped ensure families are able to join the Rhode Island workforce, thus supporting the local economy.

Furthermore, the Department of Human Services (DHS) recognizes the vital role these programs play in supporting working families, especially in communities with limited child care supply. Current local zoning restrictions can limit providers' ability to operate at capacity levels that align with DHS licensing standards and workforce needs. DHS regulations already limit the number of children that can be served by family child care providers up to a max of 12 children, in addition to other restrictions such as square footage requirements set by the federal government meant to ensure providers have the space needed to adequately meet the needs of the children they serve.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to support H7371 as it would align with our mission to promote access, stability, and high-quality care in the early childhood and education system. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Kimberly Merolla-Brito in black ink.

Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director
Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
The Honorable Mary Ann Shallcross Smith
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy