



March 30, 2026

The Honorable Susan Donovan, Chair
House Committee on Health & Human Services
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION H 7952 — AMENDING THE JOINT RESOLUTION CREATING A PERMANENT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON CHILD CARE IN RHODE ISLAND

Chair Donovan and Members of the House Committee on Health & Human Services:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for **H 7952**, which updates and strengthens Rhode Island’s Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care by renaming it the **Permanent Legislative Commission on Child Care and Early Learning**, clarifying its purpose, and updating membership to ensure broad representation and sustained cross-sector coordination.

United Way’s policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure that public systems deliver measurable value. Childcare and early learning are core family stability infrastructure; supporting parents’ ability to work, strengthening children’s development, and stabilizing the workforce that Rhode Island employers depend on.

The case for maintaining and strengthening this Commission is clear, and the bill itself reflects that urgency. H 7952 recognizes that **70% of Rhode Island children under age six and 65% of Rhode Island children ages six to seventeen** have parents in the workforce—underscoring the central role of childcare and early learning in Rhode Island’s economic functioning. The bill also affirms the evidence base that shows that high-quality early childhood programs improve children’s learning and development, and can help close early achievement gaps.

United Way of Rhode Island has participated in the work of the Rhode Island Child Care Commission and has worked closely with Commission members and state agency partners to advance practical policy and regulatory solutions for children and families. ALICE families, in particular, benefit from any policies that make their already stretched income go further to help cover their basic needs. In the course of working with the Commission, we have consistently encouraged Rhode Island to be innovative—particularly in aligning policy design with federal requirements and opportunities—to maximize available funding streams and strengthen implementation. A durable commission structure supports that goal by keeping legislative leaders, state agencies, providers, and advocates aligned around a shared, actionable agenda rather than fragmented efforts.



H 7952 strengthens the Commission’s ability to do exactly that by clarifying its purpose: to develop and recommend policies that ensure Rhode Island has a network of child care and early learning services that are **high quality, affordable, accessible, and equitable**, and to plan for current and future needs, including expansion of pre-kindergarten. The updated membership structure also supports more effective coordination across systems that families must navigate.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for **H 7952**. Maintaining and strengthening this Commission is a practical, high-impact step toward improving childcare access and early learning outcomes—advancing family stability and strengthening Rhode Island’s long-term workforce and economic resilience.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean
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United Way of Rhode Island