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Testimony on S-2085, Child Care for Child Care Educators
Senate Finance Committee
May 28, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairperson DiPalma and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is **Jocelyn Antonio**. I am a resident of the town of Cumberland. I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity as a public health professional.

I am writing to express my **strong support** for **Senate Bill 2085 – An Act Relating to Human Services – The Rhode Island Works Program**, sponsored by Senator DiMario and co-sponsored by Senators Lawson, Gallo, Valverde, Murray, Kallman, Acosta, Vargas, Lauria, and Quezada.

This bill would eliminate the sunset on the provision of funding for childcare educators and would modify the program requirements to 85% of state median income to waive any copayment.

Public Health Implications of Accessible Childcare

According to the **American Public Health Association**, **education access and quality is a core social influencer of health** - a non-medical factor that significantly impacts **health outcomes**. Educational attainment is the **single greatest predictor of a person's health and well-being across the life span** [1], [2]. Quality **early childcare** plays a **critical role in health and development, supporting learning, behavior, and social-emotional skills**, while also supporting **long-term mental and physical health**.

Numerous studies have shown that access to **high-quality, affordable childcare is associated with:**

- Improved school readiness and academic achievement [3], [4], [5], [6]
- Increased parental workforce participation and economic mobility [5], [7]
- Reduced behavioral and emotional challenges for children
- Improved maternal mental health and family well-being

Maternal Health and the Child Care Crisis

The **United States is facing a maternal health crisis**, despite spending **more per capita on maternal health than any other country** [8]. The U.S. has the **highest rate of maternal deaths among high-income nations**, and these disparities disproportionately impact **Black and Indigenous women** [9]. Access to **affordable, high-quality childcare is a crucial component of postpartum support**.

Research has found that:

- **Access to childcare** helps protect mothers from experiencing depressive symptoms.
- **Reliable childcare reduces** the impact of sleep deprivation, lowering the risk of maternal depression [10], [11].
- **Children in high-quality childcare are less likely to experience the negative emotional and behavioral effects** of maternal mental health disorders and other challenging family circumstances [12], [13], [14].

Yet, **childcare access remains deeply unequal**. Data indicates that in 2025, **52.2% of Latino/Hispanic families lived in licensed childcare deserts—a disproportionately higher rate** than the general population (45.9%) [15]. Combined with **higher maternal mental health disorders in Latino/Hispanic communities (40%)**, this underscores why passing Senate Bill 2085 is essential for public health and racial equity [16].

Supporting the Child Care Workforce

Childcare educators are foundational to early childhood development, providing essential services that influence long-term health outcomes. However, many of these professionals face economic challenges that hinder their ability to access affordable childcare for their own families. By removing the sunset provision, S-2085 ensures sustained support for these educators, allowing them to continue their vital work without the added stress of securing childcare for their own children.

Conclusion

Eliminating the sunset provision on childcare assistance for educators is not only a matter of workforce support but also a strategic public health intervention. It promotes the health of children, supports the mental well-being of parents, and contributes to the economic stability of families. I urge the committee to support and pass S-2085 to ensure the continued health and prosperity of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jocelyn P. Antonio, MPH

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