



May 27, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2085 — RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES — THE RHODE ISLAND WORKS PROGRAM

Chair DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, I write in strong support of Senate Bill 2085, which would strengthen Rhode Island's child care system by eliminating the sunset on child care assistance for eligible child care educators and staff and modifying eligibility to better align with affordability standards.

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 public systems deliver measurable value for Rhode Islanders. This includes centering ALICE households — Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed — families and individuals who are working, yet still priced out of stability by the high cost of living.

For many working families, child care is not optional; it is the infrastructure that makes employment, education, and economic mobility possible. Yet too often, the child care educators and staff who make this system work face affordability challenges in accessing child care for their own families. Senate Bill 2085 recognizes that Rhode Island cannot strengthen its child care system without also supporting the workforce that sustains it.

This matters deeply for ALICE households. In Rhode Island, 39% of households are below the ALICE Threshold, including 51,069 households in poverty and 122,439 ALICE households that earn above the federal poverty level but still cannot afford the basic cost of living. These families often face impossible tradeoffs between rent, utilities, food, transportation, health care, and child care. For workers in the child care sector, access to affordable child care can be the difference between remaining in the workforce and leaving a field that is already facing serious staffing pressures.

Senate Bill 2085 also supports the broader child care ecosystem. When child care educators and staff are better able to remain employed, programs are better positioned to maintain staffing, keep classrooms open, and provide reliable care for families. This directly supports children's early development, family economic security, and workforce participation across sectors. In that way, child care is both a family stability issue and an economic development issue.



By eliminating the sunset on this important support and improving affordability for eligible child care educators and staff, S 2085 advances a more stable, equitable, and sustainable child care system for Rhode Island. It helps retain essential workers, supports families with young children, and strengthens the foundation that allows parents and caregivers to participate fully in the workforce.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee's support for Senate Bill 2085.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island