



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 2358 — RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY —
THE RHODE ISLAND MATERNAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENT AND EQUITY ACT OF 2026**

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 2358, which would establish the Rhode Island Maternal Health Improvement and Equity Act of 2026 and make critical investments in maternal health data, workforce development, community-based access, and long-term statewide planning.

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.

Maternal health is a family stability issue. When expecting and postpartum parents cannot access timely, culturally responsive, and community-based care, the consequences affect more than one medical appointment. They shape infant health, parental well-being, workforce participation, housing stability, and long-term outcomes for children and families.

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 pregnant and postpartum parents, those tradeoffs can directly affect access to prenatal care, postpartum support, mental health services, transportation, and trusted community-based navigation.

S 2358 takes a comprehensive approach by strengthening maternal health data, expanding workforce pathways, and investing in community maternal health access grants. Better data will help Rhode Island identify disparities, understand where gaps exist, and target resources more effectively. Expanding training pathways for midwives, doulas, community birth workers, lactation consultants, and culturally responsive providers will help build a maternal health system that better reflects and serves Rhode Island families.



United Way also strongly supports the bill's investment in community-based access. Nonprofits, health centers, hospitals, municipalities, and local partners are often closest to the families most impacted by gaps in care. Investments in prenatal navigation, doula and community birth worker programs, transportation assistance, postpartum mental health, breastfeeding support, and home visiting services would strengthen the infrastructure families rely on before, during, and after birth.

United Way also recommends coordination with United Way 211 to ensure families are connected to available maternal health, housing, food, transportation, behavioral health, and family support resources. As Rhode Island's front door to services, 211 helps ensure that critical information and referrals are only a call away for expecting and postpartum parents.

By investing in data, workforce, community access, and sustainability, Senate Bill 2358 advances a stronger and more equitable maternal health system for Rhode Island. It aligns with United Way's commitment to strengthening families by addressing the conditions that allow children, caregivers, and communities to thrive.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee to support Senate Bill 2358.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island