



May 5th, 2026
Written Testimony for Public Comment
Senate Finance Committee
Re: Testimony in support of SB 2828

Chairman DiPalma and committee members,

The Jewish Alliance of Greater Rhode Island strongly supports Senate Bill 2828, which reforms the RI Works program to ensure that it is an effective program that centers caring for our most vulnerable neighbors.

Jewish tradition teaches that we are responsible for one another — that a strong community is one where no one is left to struggle alone. Our shared responsibility reminds us that the well-being of each family is tied to the well-being of the entire community. The concept of *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world, calls on us not only to perform acts of personal kindness, but to build systems and policies that reduce suffering and create meaningful opportunity. That is why strengthening RI Works is not only sound public policy — it is a moral imperative.

When families are living in deep poverty, it affects all of us. Children who lack stable housing, adequate nutrition, child care, or basic household necessities face long-term consequences in their health, educational attainment, and future economic mobility. Research consistently shows that early childhood hardship can lead to poorer outcomes later in life — outcomes that are far more costly to address after the fact. If we want strong communities in Rhode Island, we must ensure that families have a stable foundation from which children can learn, grow, and thrive.

Senate Bill 2828 takes practical, responsible steps toward that stability.

First, child support should go directly to children. Currently, families receiving RI Works are allowed to keep only \$50 of monthly child support payments, even though federal rules allow the state to pass through a significantly larger amount. That additional support could mean groceries at the end of the month, school supplies, winter coats, or reliable transportation to work. When child support reaches the household it is intended for, it reduces stress, increases family stability, and supports children's well-being. It is both fiscally responsible and morally sound to ensure that these funds benefit the children for whom they are meant.

Second, families who secure subsidized housing should not be penalized with a \$65 reduction in their RI Works benefits. In Rhode Island's high-cost housing market, \$65 is not insignificant — it can determine whether a parent can cover utility bills, afford gas to get to work, or purchase essential household items. We should be encouraging families to achieve housing stability, not creating financial setbacks when they do. Stable housing supports employment, improves educational outcomes for children, and



strengthens neighborhoods. Removing this reduction is a common-sense step that aligns our policies with our goals.

Third, RI Works benefits remain far below the Federal Poverty Level, even though most participants are children. No child should grow up in extreme poverty in our state. Raising benefits to 100% of the Federal Poverty Level would help families meet basic needs and provide the stability parents need to seek employment, pursue job training, and care for their children. Importantly, this proposal can be implemented using existing federal TANF funds, making it a responsible investment in Rhode Island families without placing additional strain on the state budget. When families have a basic level of stability, they are better positioned to move toward long-term economic security.

Finally, restoring eligibility for legal permanent residents recognizes the contributions of families who live, work, and raise their children here in Rhode Island. These are our neighbors, coworkers, and community members. Ensuring access to RI Works allows them to weather temporary hardship and continue contributing to our state's economy and civic life. Inclusion strengthens communities; exclusion deepens hardship.

Caring for our neighbors is not an abstract principle. It means making thoughtful, practical policy decisions that reduce hardship and expand opportunity. It means recognizing that investing in children and families today creates a healthier, more prosperous Rhode Island tomorrow.

House Bill 7689 reflects our shared values of responsibility, fairness, and community. It strengthens families, supports children, and aligns our policies with our moral commitments.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support Senate Bill 2828. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Emily Gaudreau
Director, Community Advocacy and Engagement