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Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill No. 2828 – Rhode Island Works Program
Senate Finance Committee
May 5, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairperson DiPalma and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

My name is **Jocelyn Antonio**. I am resident of Cumberland and a public health professional offering this testimony in my personal capacity.

As a public health advocate, I strongly urge your favorable consideration and **support of S-2828 – An Act Relating to Human Services – The Rhode Island Works Program**, sponsored by Senator Murray and co-sponsored by Senators Acosta, Bissaillon, Gu, DiPalma, Thompson, LaMountain, Bell, Pearson, and Felag.

1. Aligning Benefits with Human Needs

The bill proposes increasing the payment standard to 100% of the federal poverty level, to be adjusted on a yearly basis. For context, according to the Economic Progress Institute, a single parent with two children living in Providence County needs to earn \$7,736 pre-tax monthly to make ends meet [1]. Currently, the standard benefit for a family of 3 is only \$865 per month (or \$791 per month for those with subsidized housing), roughly 41% of the poverty threshold. S-2828 would increase that standard benefit to \$2,277. While this still falls short of the standard of need of a working family of 3, indexing these benefits to the federal poverty level creates a wider safety net. This ensures the “floor” for Rhode Island families doesn’t erode due to inflation, protecting children from chronic stress and food insecurity associated with deep poverty.

2. Removing Barriers for Lawful Residents

Public health is only as strong as its most vulnerable population. Eliminating the waiting period for lawful permanent residents ensures that families have immediate access to the resources needed for health and safety. Our state does not wait to reap the contributions of lawful permanent residents; neither should we delay the support they need to thrive.

3. Ending the “Subsidize Housing Penalty”

Currently, families in subsidized housing face a \$65 benefit reduction. This essentially penalizes families for securing stable housing, a foundation of health [2]. This bill proposes eliminating this reduction and allowing families to use these funds on other essentials.

4. Supporting Family Stability through Child Support

Increasing the “pass-through” for child support from \$50 to \$100 for one child and \$200 for families with multiple children puts more money directly in the hands of caregivers. Data consistently shows that when families receive more of their owed child support, it reduces disruptions in family relationships, reduces the risk of child maltreatment and increases the overall resources available for a child to grow healthy [3], [4].

Conclusion

This bill is not about spending; it is about investing the state's safety net and our public health infrastructure. When families are provided support to meet their basic needs, we see measurable improvements in mental health and educational attainment. I respectfully ask your consideration and passage of S-2828.

Thank you for your time.

Jocelyn P. Antonio, MPH

Reference:

- [1] The Economic Progress Institute, "The 2024 Rhode Island Standard of Need," Economic Progress Institute, 2024. Accessed: Apr. 02, 2025. [Online]. Available: https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/RISN_2024_web_14.pdf
- [2] American Public Health Association, "The Nation's Health series: Social determinants of health | The Nation's Health." Accessed: Mar. 04, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/nations-health-series-social-determinants-health>
- [3] "Six Strategies to Design Equitable Child Support Systems," Child Trends. Accessed: Mar. 04, 2026. [Online]. Available: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/six-strategies-to-design-equitable-child-support-systems>
- [4] M. Cancian, M.-Y. Yang, and K. S. Slack, "The Effect of Additional Child Support Income on the Risk of Child Maltreatment," *Social Service Review*, vol. 87, no. 3, pp. 417–437, Sep. 2013, doi: 10.1086/671929.