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Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Ditra Edwards. I am writing on behalf of SISTA Fire, a grassroots organization in Rhode Island that builds collective power with women and nonbinary people of color. Many of our members are mothers and caregivers raising children while navigating rising housing costs, low wages, and unstable work. We write in strong support of **Senate Bill 2828**.

SISTA Fire is also a member of the Raising RI Coalition, a coalition of more than 60 organizations working to end deep poverty for children in Rhode Island. We support this bill because it strengthens the basic supports families rely on to survive and raise their children with dignity.

Our members understand that when families have stability, communities are stable. When families face constant financial crisis, the impacts ripple through every part of life. Parents struggle to keep food on the table. Children struggle to learn and grow in unstable environments. Communities lose the conditions they need to thrive.

First, increase the pass-through of child support.

Child support exists to support children. Yet families receiving RI Works only receive the first \$50 of monthly child support payments. The rest is kept by the state through cost recovery. Federal rules already allow states to pass through up to \$100 for one child and \$200 for two or more children without penalty.

For families already living on the edge, this support matters. That money pays for groceries, diapers, school supplies, and transportation to work. When families receive the child support intended for their children, they gain breathing room in household budgets that are already stretched thin.

Second, eliminate the \$65 reduction for families living in subsidized housing.

Families who have secured subsidized housing have taken an important step toward stability. Yet Rhode Island reduces its RI Works benefit by \$65 each month. At a time when the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island is over \$2,300 per month, every dollar matters for low-income families.

Our members consistently tell us that stable housing is the foundation of everything else. Healthy communities start with strong, stable homes. When housing stabilizes, families can

focus on work, childcare, education, and community life. When housing destabilizes, everything else begins to fall apart.

Eliminating this reduction allows families to use that money for basic needs such as food, transportation, medication, and childcare. Housing stability should be supported, not penalized.

Third, raise RI Works benefits to 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

RI Works is a program that serves children first. Sixty-eight percent of participants are children. Yet the maximum benefit for a family of three is \$865 per month. That amount equals only about 41 percent of the federal poverty level.

No child can thrive when their family lives in deep poverty. Families need enough income to cover basic necessities such as food, utilities, transportation, and housing. Increasing benefits would give parents the stability they need to pursue employment, job training, and education while caring for their children.

Finally, restore eligibility for legal permanent residents.

Families with lawful permanent residency live and work in Rhode Island. They pay taxes, raise children in our schools, and contribute to our communities. Yet Rhode Island requires these families to wait five years before accessing RI Works.

This waiting period blocks families from workforce supports and cash assistance designed to help them build economic stability. Removing this barrier allows families to access training, employment services, and basic support sooner so they can care for their children and contribute to the state's economy.

Members of SISTA Fire often say that strong communities begin with families who have what they need to live with dignity. **Senate Bill 2828** moves Rhode Island closer to that goal.

This bill directs resources to children and the caregivers raising them. It supports housing stability. It strengthens family income. It ensures that families who live and work in Rhode Island have access to the tools they need to build stable lives.

For these reasons, SISTA Fire urges the committee to pass Senate Bill 2828.