



May 5, 2026

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

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL S2845 — THE RHODE ISLAND FAMILY HOME-VISITING ACT

Chair DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for Senate Bill S2845, which would strengthen Rhode Island's family home-visiting system by formally adding First Connections to the statute, improving annual reporting requirements, requiring the state to draw down the maximum available federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting funds, and directing Medicaid rate increases for family home-visiting services.

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 that public systems deliver measurable value. This includes centering ALICE households — Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. ALICE households are those where members of the household are working, yet find themselves priced out of stability by the high cost of living). The ALICE framework defines basic needs as housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare, and technology. For families facing economic hardship, access to cash assistance can be the difference between stability and crisis.

In Rhode Island, 39% of households are below the ALICE Threshold, underscoring how many families have limited financial margin and how essential early, voluntary, and community-based supports are to family stability.

S2845 recognizes that a child's earliest experiences lay the foundation for development, learning, and long-term success. Voluntary, high-quality home-visiting programs help families connect to essential resources, adjust to parenthood, build parenting skills, and address challenges commonly faced by young families. The bill also notes that Rhode Island's First Connections program has served expectant mothers and families with newborns, infants, and toddlers for decades, yet the number of families receiving at least one First Connections visit declined by 42% between 2021 and 2024.

This legislation is especially important because Rhode Island is not fully maximizing available federal home-visiting resources. The bill finds that Rhode Island did not meet the full state match challenge in 2024 and 2025 and therefore was unable to draw down the full federal MIECHV grant. It also notes that Medicaid billing and other funding challenges have contributed



to a 32% decline in families receiving evidence-based home-visiting services and the closure of seven home-visiting programs since 2021.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for Senate Bill S2845. Strengthening family home visiting is a practical investment in maternal and child health, early childhood development, family economic security, and school readiness. By stabilizing funding, improving transparency, supporting providers, and maximizing federal dollars, Rhode Island can better serve young children and families when support matters most.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean
Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island