

Testimony in support of S 2173
Senate Committee on Labor and Gaming
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The Economic Progress Institute supports Senator Acosta's SB 2173, which would eliminate the payment requirement on criminal background checks for applicants seeking employment in childcare and youth services. The passage of this bill would remove barriers to employment for a vital workforce that suffers from a chronic staffing crisis.

High-quality childcare and robust, enriching youth services are essential for a thriving community. These vital programs need qualified workers to provide these services. By requiring applicants to pay for their own criminal background checks, people who are not yet hired by the agency are paying for the chance to be employed. For working class Rhode Islanders, having to pay for criminal background checks could be the deciding factor between applying for a job in childcare or youth services or working in another field that doesn't require fees during the hiring process. These fees (without the guarantee of employment) act as a deterrent to employment and unfairly place responsibility on applicants rather than the employer.

As a social worker that has worked in the child welfare system in Rhode Island for nearly five years, I have seen how delays in the hiring process can disrupt programs, increase burnout, and hold back well-qualified individuals. Although I recognize the importance of screening potential employees, requiring applicants to pay for their own background check comes across as an application fee and adds a financial barrier that could prevent qualified individuals from joining this essential workforce.

Vermont passed similar legislation as part of an effort to revitalize their childcare and youth service industries – we should follow their lead.¹ Senator Acosta's SB 2173 aids in removing barriers for qualified Rhode Islanders to join the chronically understaffed childcare and child welfare sectors.

The Economic Progress Institute urges passage.

¹ [Vermont Background Check: A Complete Guide \[2026\]](#)