

May 12, 2026

House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: In support of H7320, The Rhode Island Work Program

Dear Representatives Diaz, Slater, Shallcross Smith, Donovan, Casimiro, Cruz, Kislak, Edwards, Felix, and Tanzi,

My name is Jenah Morrell. I am a mother to two children, and I am an RI Pre-K teacher at Children's Friend and Service. I am writing in support of the language and child support enforcement requirement changes proposed in bill H7320. I feel that the proposed changes are necessary in order to better meet the specific needs of families and children who need access to quality childcare opportunities.

I became a first time mother in 2003. At the time, my son's father lived across the country, and I was left attempting to obtain affordable childcare for my infant son, so that I could find a job to support us. When I first contacted DHS regarding childcare assistance, I was informed that I would need to first engage in the child support enforcement process. At the time, there was no way to contact my son's father, nor was he even listed on his birth certificate. I was told there was no help for me unless I engaged in this process.

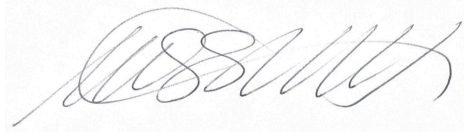
I had to wait while the state attempted to contact my son's father, and attempt to get him to participate in providing child support. Their efforts proved futile and eventually, after several long months of waiting, I was granted childcare assistance after it was determined the state would be unable to enforce the child support mandate. This wait prevented me from being able to enter the workforce and begin to provide for my son and myself. While I was fortunate to have a family who could help financially support us during that time, I know that there are many families for whom that is not an option.

The change to eliminate the mandated enrollment in child support enforcement will open doors for so many parents. Oftentimes there are reasons why a parent may choose to not engage an absent parent in the child support process. Some may be leaving an abusive situation, and contacting them regarding child support would put them and their child at severe risk. There may be no means of contacting the absent parent, as in my case, and the long months of waiting for the state to even try may create housing instability, food insecurity, or serious medical concerns as families wait to obtain the essential childcare services that allow them to actively participate

in the work force. Parents must be granted the opportunity to apply for childcare assistance in a safe and effective manner. Removing the child support enforcement mandate is a necessary step in ensuring that all families will have equitable access to safe and affordable childcare options that meet their needs.

I want to thank each and every one of you for your time and review of this testimony, and your continued action and support in ensuring that Rhode Island families, and their children, have access to safe, affordable, quality childcare opportunities. This is why I strongly urge you to support the language and requirement changes in H7320, as this will be a huge step towards our collective goals of helping to establish safe, healthy, productive households for all Rhode Island families. If you have any further questions or require any additional information you can reach me at jmorrell@cfsri.org.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenah L.S. Morrell', written in a cursive style.

Jenah L.S Morrell