



Public Testimony  
Senate Finance Committee  
Re: Child Care Assistance  
Senate Bill 2130, Senate Bill 2131 and Senate Bill 2574  
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Submitted by The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

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Good afternoon. My name is Emily Jones and I'm speaking on behalf of the Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty, a coalition of diverse religious communities and advocacy partners throughout the state who have come together to fight poverty.

I am testifying today to voice our organization's strong support for three bills that increase access to affordable, high-quality child care for low-income Rhode Island families: Senate Bill 2130, Senate Bill 2131 and Senate Bill 2574.

We all have good reasons – both moral and pragmatic – to invest heavily in our state's children. Our faith traditions teach us of the special obligation we have to our communities' youngest members. Research has consistently demonstrated the lifelong benefits of high-quality early childhood care and education. We encourage you to expand access to the child care assistance program.

For many working families, child care consumes an outsized portion of the family budget – far more than what we would consider affordable based on family income. Over the years, Rhode Island's child care assistance program has provided significant, much-needed support to many low-income families, allowing children to access safe, high-quality child care while their parents are working or preparing for work.

- Senate Bill 2130: We support raising the entry eligibility limit for sliding-scale support to include families who earn between 180 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Increased access to the child care assistance program would substantially ease the child care cost burden for many struggling families.
- Senate Bill 2131: The Child Care Exit Income Pilot program is set to expire on September 30<sup>th</sup> of this year. We support making permanent the exit income limit of 225 percent of the federal poverty level. This protects families who would otherwise face a child care cost “cliff” that sets them back, financially, just as they are beginning to make forward progress.
- Senate Bill 2574: Adequate reimbursement rates are necessary to maintain high-quality providers' participation in the child care assistance program. We are concerned that inadequate reimbursement rates will exacerbate a two-tiered system of child care, with low-income children unable to access high-quality care. Further, we believe that caring for children should never be a poverty-wage job. Recognizing the vital and sacred nature of this work, we support efforts to ensure that child care workers earn a decent wage for both home- and center-based services.

Thank you for your dedicated public service.