



Public Testimony
Senate Finance Committee
Re: Child Care Assistance
Senate Bills 122, 141, 775 and Governor's Budget Article
May 18, 2017

Submitted by The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

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Good afternoon. 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 several bills that increase access to affordable, high-quality child care for low-income Rhode Island families.

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 775: Adequate reimbursement rates are necessary to maintain high-quality providers' participation in the child care assistance program, particularly at the infant/toddler level, where high caregiver to child ratios are essential and costs are high. 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.
- Governor's Budget Article/Senate Bill 122: 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. It is also our understanding that this improves our compliance with federal expectations and requirements.
- Senate Bill 141: 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.

Thank you for your dedicated public service.