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401-467-9940  
www.ricadv.org  
ricadv@ricadv.org  
24-hour Helpline:  
800-494-8100

#### *Member Agencies*

Blackstone Valley  
Advocacy Center

Domestic Violence  
Resource Center of  
South County

Elizabeth Buffum  
Chace Center

Women's Resource Center

#### *Task Force*

Sisters Overcoming  
Abusive Relationships

#### *Affiliate Members*

Center for Southeast Asians

Crossroads Rhode Island

Family Service of Rhode Island

McAuley Ministries –  
McAuley Village

Progreso Latino

YWCA Rhode Island

To: Senator Ryan Pearson, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee  
Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Lucy Rios, Interim Executive Director  
RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: March 29, 2022

Re: **Support for S 2316 – RI Works**

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On behalf of our network of member agencies and SOAR, our taskforce of survivors, the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence appreciates this opportunity to express our **support for Senate bill 2316, regarding the RI Works program**. This bill would increase the monthly RI Works benefit and require an annual cost-of-living adjustment; allow parents on RI Works to attend 2 years at CCRI; and extend the lifetime benefit limit to 60 months.

Increasing the resource limit from \$1,000 to \$5,000 will allow parents to save money to provide a cushion for when they are earning enough to no longer qualify for cash assistance, or allow them to have money in a savings account for their children's higher education.

**Poverty and income inequality are root causes of domestic violence. 1 in 4 American women report having experienced a negative impact from physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.** The societal costs associated with intimate partner violence are substantial. According to the CDC, the lifetime per-victim cost is \$103,767 for women and \$23,414 for men. The lifetime economic cost to the U.S. population associated with medical services for abuse-related injuries, lost productivity from paid work, criminal justice and other costs is \$3.6 trillion. This economic cost estimate includes almost 32 million women and 12 million men who are victims of intimate partner violence during their lives.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV) is to eliminate domestic violence in Rhode Island. Our mission is to support and enhance the work of our member agencies and to provide leadership on the issue of domestic violence. The member agencies of the RICADV provide essential services to thousands of survivors of domestic violence and their children every year in Rhode Island. These services help survivors build resilience and find safety after experiencing abuse.

The RICADV, partnered with DHS and Newport's Women's Resource Center, oversees the Family Violence Option Advocacy Program (FVOAP), which assists hundreds of DHS clients annually who are victims and survivors of domestic violence. The FVOAP works with the Department of Human Services (DHS), RI Works cash assistance program, and the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Through the FVOAP, clients may be able to obtain a waiver from certain requirements of the RI Works program or Child Care Assistance Program. The FVOAP domestic violence advocates also assist victims and survivors with safety planning and provide referrals to various programs and services

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<sup>1</sup> Intimate partner violence: Consequences. *U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>

throughout the state. The RI Works program and FVOAP help parent's access work-readiness and financial literacy resources to further their ability to remain economically independent and financially empowered after leaving an abusive partner or experiencing financial abuse.

The parents in the FVOAP domestic violence program need additional resources and flexibility to obtain the skills necessary to enter the workforce and be able to keep a long-term job to support their children and remain financially secure after escaping abuse and living through violent trauma. They may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression or other mental health issues. Survivors may be unable to rejoin the workforce permanently due to safety concerns, particularly if their abuser stalks them. They may need additional time and resources to complete their educational goals or to establish safe and affordable housing for themselves and their children.

Financial insecurity is a prominent reason that victims are unable to leave an abusive relationship. No victim of domestic violence should have to choose between economic security and their own safety, which is why basic-needs social safety net programs such as RI Works are so essential to keep survivors and their children safe.

**For these reasons, we urge you to support Senate bill 2316, to enhance this lifeline of a program for Rhode Islanders and their children living in deep poverty.**



To: Senate Committee on Finance  
From: Linda Katz, Policy Director  
Date: March 29, 2022  
Re: Support S-2316. Improving the RI Works Program

The Economic Progress Institute (EPI) writes in strong support of S-2316 sponsored by Senator Melissa Murray. We thank Senator Murray and this Committee for your leadership last year in enacting an increase in the RI Works benefit for the first time in 30 years. That was an important step in improving economic well-being for families relying on the RI Works program.

This year, we hope you will again enact changes that will lift children out of deep poverty by further increasing the benefit and keep children out of deep poverty by indexing the benefit to inflation. We hope you will also promote the long-term economic stability for families and help break the cycle of poverty by providing parents with an opportunity to gain the skills they need to secure a well-paying job and to support them as they enter the workforce.

The Economic Progress Institute facilitates the Raising RI Coalition which includes 50 community, healthcare, social service, faith, and advocacy organizations that serve low-income families. A list of Coalition members is attached. The Coalition is working to support Senator Murray's bill and the companion bill in the House.

The following are some key points in support of each of the 3 changes proposed in the bill. Additional information is included in the attached Fact Sheet.

***Increase the monthly cash assistance payment from 50% of the federal poverty level, to move children out of deep poverty and provide a yearly cost-of-living increase to prevent erosion of the value of the benefit***

Despite the increase in the benefit last year, children enrolled in RI Works are still living in deep poverty. The 2022 federal poverty level (FPL) for a family of 3 is \$1,919 and the RI Works payment for a family of 3 is \$721/month, just 38% of the poverty level.

When the benefit increase was enacted last year, it was equal to 39% of the federal poverty level. Now it is only 37% FPL because the federal poverty level rose in January. The benefit will continue to lose value – and children will fall deeper into poverty - unless the law provides for an annual cost-of-living increase.

The federal cash assistance program for low-income seniors and people with disabilities, the Supplemental Security Income program, provides an entitlement to a basic benefit amount and is increased each year to account for inflation. But the federal cash assistance program for children and

their caregivers, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Children (TANF) program is a block grant to the states and the law does not require a minimum benefit amount or yearly cost-of-living increase.

The lack of an entitlement benefit for children and their families that is adequate to meet their most minimal basic needs is rooted in the racism and sexism underlying the Aid to Families with Dependent Children implemented as part of the 1935 Social Security Act.

***Allow parents to attend CCRI for two years as the sole employment plan activity to increase opportunities for better-paying jobs***

- RI Works provides parents with opportunities to gain skills for employment and most parents are required to have an active “employment plan” as a condition of receiving benefits.
- Current rules allow a parent to attend CCRI for one year as her only employment plan activity. In the second year, the parent must be working at least 20 hours/week if she wants to continue her education at CCRI.
- In 2020, workers with an **associate degree** had median yearly **earnings** of \$48,776, compared with just \$40,612 for people with a high school diploma alone.

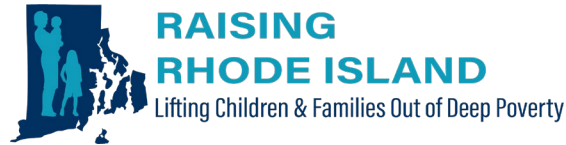
***Increase the lifetime benefit limit from 48 months to 60 months to reduce stress for parents and ease the administrative burden on DHS***

- Federal law allows states to provide 60 months of TANF-funded benefits to needy children and families.
- Rhode Island is one of only 11 states that has a time limit that is less than 60 months.
- Under state law, families that reach the 48-month time limit can apply for hardship benefits to keep their assistance for another 12 months and the majority do so.

***Use more of the federal block grant for its primary purpose – to support children and their families***

“Rhode Island receives \$95.6M in federal block grant funds for the RI Works program, and *less than one-quarter* is spent on the 5,000 children and 1,600 adults who rely on the program to meet basic needs. Rhode Island stopped investing its own funds to support RI Works families in 2010. It is not a question of whether our state has enough money to fund the changes proposed in this bill. We do. It is whether we have the political will to finally prioritize these families and show the children and their parents that we care about them.

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## Coalition Members

- Center for Southeast Asians
- Community Action Partnership of Providence
- Community Care Alliance
- Comprehensive Community Action Program
- Cranston Clergy Association
- Direct Action for Rights and Equality
- Domestic Violence Resource Center of South County
- Dorcas International Institute of RI
- Facilitate Change
- Family Service of Rhode Island
- Formerly Incarcerated Union of RI
- Foster Forward
- Genesis Center
- Goodwill of Southern New England
- Jewish Alliance of Greater Rhode Island
- Jonnycake Center of Peace Dale
- National Association of Social Workers Rhode Island Chapter
- Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island
- Newport Partnership for Families
- Progreso Latino
- ResCare Workforce Services
- Rhode Island AFL-CIO
- Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families
- Rhode Island Community Action Association
- Rhode Island Health Center Association
- Rhode Island Kids Count
- Rhode Island National Organization for Women
- Rhode Island Parent Information Center
- Rhode Island Organizing Project
- Scandinavian Church
- Sojourner House
- Paul Catholic Church
- Temple Sinai Social Action Committee
- The Economic Progress Institute
- The Jewish Alliance of Greater Rhode Island
- The Latino Policy Institute
- The Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
- The Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- The Rhode Island Community Food Bank
- The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty
- The Womxn Project
- Tomaquag Museum
- Tri-County Community Action Agency
- United Way of Rhode Island
- URI Feinstein Hunger Center
- Washington County Coalition for Children
- Westbay Community Action
- Women's Resource Center
- Woodridge Congregational Church
- Working Cities Newport



To help some of the **poorest children** & families, these bills propose **three changes** to the **Rhode Island Works Program**, (the state's cash assistance and workforce readiness program).

## **LIFT CHILDREN OUT OF DEEP POVERTY BY INCREASING THE MONTHLY BENEFIT AND REQUIRING AN ANNUAL COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT.**

- The benefit increase last year moved the needle on economic well-being for the 5,000 children receiving benefits, but they are still living in deep poverty. Increasing the monthly benefit to 50% of the poverty level (from \$721 to \$959 for a family of 3) will further help Rhode Island's poorest children.
- An annual cost-of-living adjustment will prevent the loss of the value of the RI Works monthly benefit over time. During the recent ten-year period (2012 - 2021), the cost-of-living has increased annually by an average of 1.9%. More recently, basic needs items for families with young children have increased significantly. For example, the average unit price of diapers increased 14% from January 2021 to January 2022.
- Children living in poverty, especially those living in deep poverty, are more likely to have health, behavioral, educational, economic, and social difficulties, earn less as adults, and be unemployed more frequently.

## **ALLOW PARENTS ON RI WORKS TO ATTEND 2 YEARS AT CCRI**

- Currently RI Works parents can attend only one year at CCRI without additional activities. In the second year, the parent must add at least 20 hours/week of employment if she wants to continue her education while keeping RIW benefits.
- Between 2019 and 2029, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certification are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring a high school diploma or less.
- In 2020, workers with an associate's degree had median weekly earnings of \$938 and an unemployment rate of 7.1%, compared with just \$781 per week and a 9.0% unemployment rate for people with a high school diploma alone.

## **EXTEND THE LIFETIME BENEFIT LIMIT FROM 48 MONTHS TO 60 MONTHS**

- Federal law allows states to provide 60 months of TANF-funded benefits to needy children and families. (TANF is the federal program that funds the RI Works program.)
- Rhode Island is one of only 11 states that have a limit that is less than 60 months.
- Families that reach the 48-month limit must file an application for "hardship benefits" to keep their assistance and work-readiness services. Since most families file for "hardship", extending the lifetime limit to 60 months would significantly reduce stress and hardship on families and ease the process for DHS staff.

## **USE MORE OF THE FEDERAL TANF BLOCK GRANT FOR ITS PRIMARY PURPOSE—SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

- Rhode Island receives \$95 million in federal funds through the TANF block grant.
- In 2020, Rhode Island spent about \$22 million of TANF funds on basic assistance – only 14% of the total. Nationally, 22% of the block grant was spent on basic assistance that year. Even with the benefit increase enacted in 2021, the share of the block grant that supports young children and their families will remain a small portion of the available federal funds. RI should invest more of the block grant in direct assistance for the 2,700 families enrolled in the program.



Date: March 29, 2022  
To: Senate Finance Committee  
RE: **Support for S-2316**

To the Senate Finance Committee:

I write on behalf of Progreso Latino in strong support of S-2316 which will make important improvements to the RI Works program.

Progreso Latino's mission is to help Rhode Island's Latino and immigrant communities to achieve greater self-sufficiency and socio-economic progress by providing transformational programs that support personal growth and social change.

From our experience many people who come into our food pantry are RI Works recipients who lack the income to feed their families. Many people in our community struggle financially, and find it difficult to support themselves or their loved ones. We witness their struggle on a regular basis as they seek help through our social services we provide. Over 500 people solely rely on our food pantry every week. Many can't afford to spend money on a necessity such as food and clothes for their children. In the end, we have supported over 15,000 individuals with our food pantry, making us number one in Rhode Island in assistance. This should not be the case. By increasing the RI Works benefit to 50% of the poverty level we will help ensure families have that sense of security that basic necessities are met, and help them stay on their feet.

Progreso Latino also helps people who struggle with paying rent, and find it difficult to make ends meet. We regularly have over 20 people a week as we help individuals fill out their RI Rent Relief Assistance application. The median household income for Central Falls is \$32,982 with a poverty rate of 30.16%, while Rhode Island median household income is \$80,012. By raising the RI benefits more people will feel less vulnerable, and be in a position that rent won't be an issue

At Progreso Latino we also provide adult education programs such as GED, Citizenship, and ESOL for the general public. Many people have the inspiration and capacity to better themselves and receive an educational background that can better their future. By allowing parents to pursue their education and attend CCRI for two years as their employment activity they are receiving personal growth and making a social change within our community. In the end, more people will find a career that will help decrease our unemployment rate.

We strongly encourage the passing of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Jonathan De Jesus  
Community Policy Advocate  
626 Broad Street, Central Falls, Rhode Island 02863  
Phone number: 401-728-5920 ext. 321







# RHODE ISLAND MEDICAL SOCIETY

March 29, 2022

Senate Finance Committee

Testimony of Dr. Elizabeth Lange in **Support of S-2316**

I am a pediatrician at Waterman Pediatrics Coastal Medical Lifespan, the current president of the RI Medical Society, a past president of the RI chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and past vice chair of the RI KIDSCOUNT Board. In my thirty-year career, I have seen vaccines eliminate some pediatric illnesses, new medical technologies save lives, genetics testing change the diagnosis evaluations. Sadly, in my thirty years of practicing pediatrics in Rhode Island, I have seen little improvement in our state's ability to eliminate extreme poverty by providing children and their parents the supports they need to have bettering opportunities. And now, COVID has stalled or even erased the little progress that had been made.

In my practice, I still have patients and parents who go to bed hungry each night. Right now, in RI we have children who cannot go to school because they are unhoused, or they need to stay home to babysit siblings while their parents are looking for work or going to school. Currently, the social-emotional-developmental needs of RI's children are at such crisis level that our mental health system is overwhelmed.

Children living in extreme poverty are hungry and malnourished, missing the key vitamins and minerals needed for proper growth and development. Children in extreme poverty are at more risk for anemia due to iron deficiency or lead poisoning, both of which affect brain development, which in turn diversely affects academic achievement potential. Children living in extreme poverty are at increased risk of developing asthma, made worse by poor air quality in their neighborhood if they live near a highway or factory, or made worse by allergens, if their housing, if they have housing, is infected with mold and cockroaches.

Due to poverty driven stressors, children living in extreme poverty have low academic achievement, behavioral problems, social and emotional development difficulties. Extreme poverty increases parental stress, as parents try to care for their children while juggling the adult worries of housing, school, work, finances, if any of these things are even available to this family. And parental stress impacts parenting practices which increases the risk for child abuse. Extreme poverty is a constant trauma.

When stress is strong, frequent or extended, children may experience toxic stress. Much like the rings on a tree that change in a drought, toxic stress is a stress experienced at such a level that it prolongs activation of the fight or flight stress hormones in the body, which in turn directly affects, and changes, the development of the childhood brain, a forever lifelong consequence of childhood poverty. In the study of epigenetics, we now know that when a child's "biological tree rings" are changed by toxic stress, this change is permanent, even passed thru the genes to future generations.

**Thanks to the proposed three changes to RI Works Program, we have an opportunity, and frankly, an obligation to pass this important legislation to raise children and families out of extreme poverty.** The Governor's RI2030 vision, with its foundation of education, productivity and opportunity, starts with addressing all poverty, but especially extreme poverty. We cannot successfully chart a course for the future of the Ocean State unless and until we address the dire economic, housing and educational needs in our state today.

We must increase the monthly RI Work benefit and support this increase with a permanent cost of living adjustment to a level that better supports basic living needs. We must extend the lifetime RI Works benefit to 60 months. It's time to join the majority of states who provide this lifesaving timeline to needy children and families. And we must, with an unrestricted 2-year CCRI education, give families in deep poverty the knowledge and skills to be eligible for higher payer jobs.

Early in my career I heard a phrase that remains my daily guidepost as I work with and for children and families – every adult was once a child, but not every child gets to be an adult. At this unique inflection point in our state's history, we have the responsibility and resources to meaningfully improve our state by lifting more children and family from extreme poverty. **With the passage of S-2316 and H-7789 RI's children have a better opportunity of growing up safe, healthy, and educated, a better opportunity to be the adults that the envisioned RI2030 needs.**

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth B. Lange MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth B. Lange, MD FAAP  
President, Rhode Island Medical Society



March 29, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in strong support of the Raising Rhode Island Bill: Rhode Island Works extension (S-2316).

Sojourner House is a victim services agency that provides shelter, housing, and supportive services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking and their children. Over 95% of our clients are considered low-income. We provide a wide range of shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing options to our clients, because a lack of access to safe, secure housing is one of the primary reasons why victims stay with an abusive partner.

The changes proposed to the Rhode Island Works Program as outlined in the Raising Rhode Island bill provide an extraordinary opportunity to redress the pandemic's devastating economic effects on our most vulnerable population. The benefit increase last year moved the needle on economic well-being for the 5000 children receiving benefits but they are still living in deep poverty. Children living in poverty are much more likely to have health, behavioral, educational, economic, and social difficulties, earn less as adults, and be unemployed more frequently. Increasing the monthly benefit to 50% of the poverty level will further help Rhode Island's children and only benefit our state.

Raising Rhode Island also proposes an extension of the lifetime benefit limit from 48 months to 60 months. Federal law allows states to provide 60 months of benefits to needy children and families, yet Rhode Island is one of only 11 states that have a shorter limit. Rhode Island spent only 14% of TANF funds on basic assistance in 2020, significantly less than the 22% national average. Without full investment, we cannot meet our goals of reducing poverty.

If passed, the Raising Rhode Island bill would immediately benefit the most impoverished Rhode Island children while also paying dividends down the road to our state. I strongly urge you to support this bill.

Thank you for considering this testimony. If I can provide any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at [vvolz@sojournerri.org](mailto:vvolz@sojournerri.org), or by phone at (401) 861-6191.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Volz  
Executive Director

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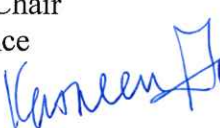
386 Smith Street | Providence, RI 02908

**Drop-in Center:** 401.861.6191 | **Fax:** 401.861.6157 | **Housing Office:** 401.808.6889

**Helplines:** 401.765.3232 | 401.658.4334 | **Web:** [www.sojournerri.org](http://www.sojournerri.org)



TO: Senator Ryan W. Pearson, Chair  
Senate Committee on Finance

FROM: Kathleen S. Gorman, Ph.D. 

RE: S2316 – An Act Relating to Human Services

DATE: March 29, 2022

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 2316 to make changes to the Rhode Island Works Program that would significantly and positively impact the lives of some of RI's poorest families.

As a professor of Psychology and the Director of the Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America at the University of Rhode Island, I have spent over two decades examining the effects of hunger and poverty on children's development. Children raised in poverty are at an increased risk of health, behavioral and mental health difficulties that not only affect them as children but last into adolescence and adulthood. Investing in children and lifting them out of poverty is the single most effective strategy to prevent long term costs of poverty, unemployment, and poor health.

S-2316 proposes to make changes to the Rhode Island Works Program that will substantively improve the lives of the families and children living in poverty. The 3 important changes included in this legislation are:

***Increasing the monthly benefit for families***, raising it to 50% of the poverty level. Considering the rising cost-of-living that disproportionately hurts low-income families, providing this small increase in monthly benefit is essential to preventing families from falling further behind.

***Allowing parents to continue their studies*** by extending RI Works benefits for 2 years while parents study without requiring additional work activities. To be successful in college is a full-time job. Expecting parents to study plus hold down a job, while raising a family does not promote academic success. This bill increases a parent's ability to become self-sufficient by providing the support they need to remain in school.

***Extending the benefit limit from 48 to 60 months*** would be consistent with federal law and reduce administrative burdens on both clients and DHS staff.

In short, this bill, which can be funded with available TANF dollars, makes economic sense, and holds promise for RI's future by helping parents and their young children succeed.

Thank you for your support.



## Washington County Coalition for Children

To: Senate Finance Committee

RE: **Support for S-2316**

Date: March 28, 2022

I write on behalf of the Washington County Coalition for Children, a regional child advocacy organization, to express **strong support for S-2316**, which will help lift our poorest children and families out of poverty. The bill's recommended changes to the RI Works Program can be supported by using more of our state's \$95M federal TANF Block grant funding, already allocated for this purpose. In 2020, RI only used 14% (\$22M) of our TANF funds to support the 2,700 impoverished families enrolled. We can and must do better for our children!

Designed as a 'safety net' program to support and stabilize impoverished families, the state's stingy RI Works program can do more to support our most vulnerable residents. S-2316 makes 3 significant improvements to the RI Works Program. This bill:

- 1) Increases the monthly benefit to 50% of the FPL and enacts a cost-of-living adjustment;
- 2) Supports parents achieving greater self-sufficiency by allowing them to attend CCRI for 2 years to obtain their Associate's degree without 20 hour/week work requirements; &
- 3) Extends the lifetime benefit limit from 48 to 60 months as the federal law allows.

These important changes both provide better support to and promote the long-term economic security of RI Works program participants.

The proposed bill will increase benefit allocations and improve the 'safety net' for impoverished children and families in our state, providing better protection against the harmful effects of poverty. It is time to forgo arcane and punitive program stipulations that perpetuate, rather than reduce poverty. RI is one of only 11 states with a cash assistance limit of less than 60 months. We can and should do better for the poorest children of our state by making the proposed program changes and allocating TANF funds differently.

Please invest in the future of our state's vulnerable children by passing S-2316 and improving the RI Works Program.

Sincerely,

Robert Hicks

March 28, 2022  
Senate Finance Committee  
Testimony in support of S-2316

To the committee:

My name is Karen Jennings and I am a resident of Woonsocket. My 14-year-old twins and I are recipients of cash assistance. I need help from RI Works to be able to support my children with what they need on an everyday basis, and receiving the benefits has helped me support them while I am pending SSI/SSDI. I support the proposed increase in the cash benefit that would help me and the other families. I also believe the minimum number of months should be raised from 48 to 60 months due to the hardship of people looking for jobs and not making enough while working. I support having the months increased to help needy families like mine that need the extra help.

**Timesha King -Goddard**  
**217 Morin Heights Blvd**  
**Woonsocket, RI 02895**

RAISING RI: PASS S-2316 (Murray)

March 23, 2022

**The Honorable Melissa A. Murray**

State House  
82 Smith St  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Senator Murray and Assembly Member's,

As your constituent, Nursing Assistant, single mom of two, domestic violence survivor and current Recipient of the RI Works's program, it's important for me to know your position on issues. Specifically, I need your commitment to support S-2316(Senator Murray). I urge you to improve higher education opportunities for access to financially stable futures.

I understand and appreciate the desire of legislators and agency officials to be wise stewards of taxpayer dollars. However, it is essential that the amended elements of this legislation which are sponsored by Sen. Melissa A. Murray be approved by all! Help Rhode Islands' most vulnerable, low income families and their children invest in the future while supporting these proposed changes to the Rhode Island Works program. These programs include cash assistance and work- readiness programs which are vital for low income families.

**Raise the monthly benefit to 50% of the federal poverty level**

- **Yes, the benefit increase last year helped thousands of children whose families are enrolled but many are STILL living in deep poverty**
  - **Children living in poverty are more likely to have health, behavioral, educational, economical and social difficulties.**
    - **I was a child growing up in poverty, which led to myself having some of these difficulties. This is the cycle I am determined to break for my children.**

**Allow parents to attend two years at CCRI so we may obtain the credentials we need for jobs that pay families sustainable wages.**

- **Between 2019 and 2029, jobs requiring a post secondary degree or certification are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring a high school diploma or less. ( US Bureau of labor and statistics)**

- Higher education is our best hope for a better life
- Currently, parents can attend first year at CCRI without any other activity. However, in the second year, the parent must work at least 20 hours/week if he/ she wants to continue their education at CCRI.
  - As a single mom with limited support for child care it is continually challenging to balance work and education while still having time to raise children and spend quality time with them!
- Rhode Island is taking other steps to expand access to post-secondary education with the establishment of Higher Education Academies and making permanent, the pilot that allow parents to use Child Care Assistance Program while attending school.

As a mother who is trying to better the future for her children, **I urge you to support S-2316(Murray).**

Best regards,

**Timesha King-Goddard**



Members of the Senate Finance committee, my name is Pablo Mijares. For the past 2 years I have been a case manager for RI Works at CCAP (Comprehensive Community Action Program.)

I assist families with the supportive services they need while working toward independence. I am currently working with 43 families. In my job, I have daily direct experience with the urgent need for increased financial support for RI Works families. I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill # S-2316 introduced by Sen Melissa Murray. I am motivated to address this committee regarding this bill by the struggles I see families going through every day. This bill proposes raising the benefit level of the RIWorks program to 50% of the Federal Poverty Limit. I strongly support this proposal.

Last year the benefit limit was increased. This was a help but families are still struggling. I talk with families every day who are unable to meet their needs for food and other necessities. The stress of not being able to meet their children's needs is heart breaking to parents.

I see many cases of mental health issues related to economic stress. In addition to an increase in the benefit amount, this bill proposes that there be adjustment each year for cost of living. This is very important. We can already see that last year's benefit increase was eaten away by inflation. These are **OUR** children. This is **OUR** future. Investing in these families is an investment in **OUR** community.

I would also like to support increasing the time limit on RI Works from 48-60 months. A majority of other states have the 60-month limit. It is time for us to do that as well. Having a 48-month limit and having to apply for hardship if that limit is reached, is one more stress for my clients. It involves having to prove that they should be given extra time

and not knowing if the application will be granted. We should spare families the unnecessary added stress that involves.

The 12 additional months being available will be a major relief to the families I am working with. Please give priority to these families. They need these changes. Their current situations and their future will be better when you pass this bill. I would like to close by reading part of a letter I received this week from one of my hard working families:

**Good afternoon Pablo,**

**“You believed in me when the entire world turned against me. Pablo you gave me hope and opened doors for me to discover who I truly was meant to be. You are one of the reasons I am who I am today and I want to thank you for that with my entire heart and soul. This CCAP and RIWorks and DHS really do help change people’s lives.”**

Please pass this bill and let's these families thrive.

Thank you!

To: Senate Committee on Finance  
From: Dr. David Upegui  
Date: March 29, 2022  
Re: Support for S-2316

My name is Dr. David Upegui. I am a Science Educator at Central Falls High School and an adjunct professor at Brown University. I strongly support S-2316, a bill that will make important changes to the RI Works program that will promote educational success for both children and their parents.

The bill promotes education success for children by increasing the benefit amount to lift children out of deep poverty. Child poverty reduces skill-building opportunities and negatively impacts academic outcomes, creating unnecessary challenges for children's learning. As a society that benefits from the talents of all people, we must be committed to educating all our children, regardless of socio-economic status. Similarly, we should also do all we can to lift children out of poverty, knowing that investing in these children will pay high dividends as they become productive members of society. Increasing the benefit paid to families enrolled in the RI Works program and ensuring that the benefit keeps pace with inflation are small steps we can take to protect our kids now and the future of Rhode Island.

The proposal to allow parents to attend two years at CCRI is also important to me as an educator. We know that more education translates into better living outcomes including higher wages. Median wages for workers with an Associate's degree are \$8,000/year higher than those who have a high school diploma. We should allow and encourage parents receiving RI Works benefits to achieve as much education as they can while enrolled in the program.

Under-educating children not only robs them of their natural talents, but it robs all of us as a society of those gifts they innately possess. Who can say that in front of us are not the next Sonia Sotomayor, Dr. Lynn Margulis, Albert Einstein, or Michael Faraday? The universe is not stingy with talents and it has spread them everywhere. Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure that the next stewards of the earth have the skills and knowledge they will need to solve the problems they will inherit. We must take steps to improve the economic security of our families by increasing the RI Works benefit as this bill proposes while committing to nurturing the talents of all of our children regardless of their socio-economic background.

Sincerely,  
Dr. David Upegui (ES)