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May 6, 2024

Subject: Support for H-7122: Removing Barriers to Child Care Assistance

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of SEIU 1199NE, which represents thousands of healthcare, service, and child care workers across Rhode Island, I am writing to express our strong support for Representative Grace Diaz's bill, H-7122. This legislation aims to remove the requirement for cooperation with the state's Child Support Enforcement Office as a criterion for eligibility for Child Care Assistance.

Rhode Island is currently one of only nine states in the U.S. that mandates parents—predominantly mothers—to engage with child support enforcement to qualify for child care assistance. This includes undergoing processes such as genetic testing for paternity and attending multiple court appointments over several years to establish and enforce child support orders. Since its enactment in 2006, this requirement has not demonstrably improved compliance or aided families in accessing additional financial support, thereby failing to justify the significant burden it places on families and the administrative systems that support them.

The policy not only adds unnecessary strain but also creates barriers for parents striving to secure stable child care, which is essential for maintaining employment and supporting their families. This is particularly impactful for members of our union, many of whom rely on child care assistance to ensure their children are cared for while they provide critical services in healthcare and education sectors.

It is noteworthy that several states, recognizing the impediments such policies pose, have chosen to eliminate this requirement. Connecticut removed it in 2006, New York followed in 2009, Mississippi in 2023, and Michigan has announced plans to discontinue it in 2024. These states have acknowledged that removing such barriers can lead to

more effective support systems that directly benefit working families by simplifying access to crucial child care services.

By supporting H-7122, Rhode Island has the opportunity to align with this more supportive approach, enhancing the ability of parents to secure necessary child care without the added complication and stress of child support enforcement processes. Such a change is not only beneficial for individual families but strengthens our community by ensuring that parents can work, and children are well-cared for in supportive environments.

We urge you to pass H-7122 and remove these unnecessary barriers, thereby reaffirming Rhode Island's commitment to supporting its working families and ensuring their access to vital child care services.

Thank you for considering our strong support for this critical legislation. We look forward to its passage and the positive impact it will undoubtedly have on the well-being of families across our state.

Sincerely,

Alex Moore