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#### 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: Representative Marvin L. Abney, Chair of the House Finance Committee  
Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee

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

Date: May 9, 2024

Re: **Support for H 7686 – RI Works Program**

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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 House bill 7686, regarding the RI Works program**. This bill would increase the monthly RI Works benefit and require an annual cost-of-living adjustment; repeal the full family sanction policy that punishes children; and restore program eligibility to lawful permanent residents without a waiting period.

Nearly 1 in 2 women in Rhode Island report experiencing intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup> National research indicates that domestic violence is more likely to occur when a couple has children.<sup>2</sup> Children in our state experience serious negative impacts related to domestic violence – 24% of the time a domestic violence arrest is made in RI, children are present and witness the incident.<sup>3</sup> These impacts can be long lasting and harm the mental, emotional, physical, and economic health of all family members exposed to violence.

**The relationship between poverty and domestic violence is well-documented – when survivors don't have access to secure economic resources, they are less able to leave an abusive relationship.** Survivors who rely on RI Works often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression or other mental health issues. They may be unable to rejoin the workforce permanently due to safety concerns, particularly if their abuser stalks them. They may need additional time and support to complete their educational goals or to establish safe and affordable housing for themselves and their children.

Recognizing this intersection between families experiencing poverty and domestic violence, the RICADV, in partnership with the Department of Human Services and the Women's Resource Center, oversees the Family Violence Option Advocacy Program (FVOAP), which assists hundreds of DHS clients who are victims and survivors of domestic violence in accessing vital economic resources through the RI Works Cash and Child Care Assistance Programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith SG, Khatiwada S, Richardson L, Basile KC, Friar NW, Chen J, Zhang Kudon H, & Leemis RW. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 State Report. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2023

<sup>2</sup> Chamberlain, L. (2018). Futures Without Violence: Updated Comprehensive Review of Interventions for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence. <https://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Rhode Island Kids Count. *Children Witnessing Domestic Violence*. Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook. 2023.

[https://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/2023%20Factbook%20Files/FB2023\\_Children%20Witnessing%20Domestic%20Violence.pdf?ver=2023-05-10-100628-510](https://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/2023%20Factbook%20Files/FB2023_Children%20Witnessing%20Domestic%20Violence.pdf?ver=2023-05-10-100628-510)

The parents in the FVOAP receive additional support and flexibility to obtain the skills necessary to enter the workforce and retain long-term employment to support their children and remain financially secure after escaping abuse and living through violent trauma. RI Works and FVOAP help parents access economic assistance, 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.

No victim of domestic violence should have to choose between economic security and personal safety, which is why basic-needs social safety net programs such as RI Works are so essential to keep survivors and their children safe.

**RI Works is a lifeline for Rhode Island families living in deep poverty, many of whom are enduring or escaping domestic violence and rely on access to supportive economic resources. We urge you to support House bill 7686 to strengthen this program for all children and families across the state.**