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To: House Finance Committee
From: Rabbi Jeffrey Goldwasser, Temple Sinai, Cranston
Date: May 9, 2024
Re: Support for H-7686, The Rhode Island Works Program

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I serve on the Executive Committee of the Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty, one of 60 organizations represented in the Raising RI Coalition fighting to pass House Bill 7686. I want to thank Representative Handy for sponsoring and Representatives Vella-Wilkinson, Cruz, Potter, Kazarian, Sanchez, Morales, Slater, Diaz, and Batista for co-sponsoring.

The Interfaith Coalition represents clergy and lay leaders from many different faith traditions. We are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and more. All of our traditions speak clearly of our obligation to offer compassion and justice to those living in poverty. The biblical book of Deuteronomy teaches, "Give readily and have no regrets when you ... give to your needy kin" (Deuteronomy 15:9-10). It is an obligation that is incumbent on individuals and on society as a whole.

House Bill 7686 takes us in this direction. This legislation increases the monthly benefit for Rhode Island's poorest children and families to bring them up to 50% of the federal poverty level with an annual cost-of-living increase. It removes a heartless penalty that deprives benefits to children with a parent who has been sanctioned three times. It removes the five-year waiting period for lawful permanent residents to receive benefits.

The religious obligation to bring relief to those who suffer in poverty is a spiritual teaching – one that opens our hearts to see other people as beings with the same needs as ourselves. It is also a practical teaching, as it forces us to recognize that any society that tolerates abject poverty will suffer from the loss of human capacity and the deterioration of basic institutions. This is why our traditions teach us that supporting those in need brings us "blessings in all [our] efforts and undertakings" (Deuteronomy 15:10). We help ourselves by helping those in need. The cost of lifting people out of poverty is far less than the cost of allowing poverty to persist.

I Thank you for receiving and reviewing this testimony. Thank you for your consideration of swift passage of this important legislation.



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