



**Testimony Re: House Bill 7854 - RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES -- PUBLIC ASSISTANCE ACT**

**House Finance Committee**

**May 15, 2024**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 7854 and thank Representative Morales for sponsoring and Representative Giraldo, Handy, Sanchez, Cotter, Vella-Wilkinson, Felix, Kislak, Henries, and Diaz for co-sponsoring. This act would allow eligible individuals or households to receive an additional \$40 per month in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits starting July 1, 2024.

Hunger and lack of regular access to sufficient food are linked to serious physical, psychological, emotional, and academic problems in children and can interfere with their growth and development. Research indicates that SNAP increases food access, reduces poverty, and helps low-income individuals and families obtain better nutrition through monthly benefits they can use to purchase food at retail stores and some farmers' markets.

In Rhode Island in 2023, 31% of SNAP recipients were children, and of the enrolled children, 32% were under the age of six. **According to 2023 survey data from the RI Life Index, 38% of households with children in Rhode Island reported not being able to meet their basic food needs, compared to 29% of all households.**

Between March 2020 and February 2023, all SNAP households were eligible for a supplemental benefit of at least \$95 during the COVID-19 public health emergency. By March 2023, these supplemental benefits ended due to the passage of the *Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023*. Yet a study on food costs in Rhode Island revealed an **11% increase in food prices from July 2022 to July 2023, adding to the high food inflation from the previous year.**

Increasing the monthly SNAP benefits for families will support the overall well-being of the children in our state, so we urge passage.

We thank the General Assembly for their commitment to reducing child hunger and supporting the healthy growth of the children in Rhode Island.

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