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Viewpoint: For

Article 10, Sections 3 and 4: Health and Human Services

Thank you to the members of this committee for holding this hearing to speak about an opportunity to help break cyclical generational poverty in our state.

I work every day with RI Works families, directly supporting recipients who are trying to find work or education that will help them rise above the need for state support. One of the hardest parts of my job is that so many of the people I work with struggle to have a basic hope of an improved future for themselves or their ability to provide that improved future for their children. No two people who I work with arrive by the same path, but there are certain barriers that recur over, and over again. The Baby Bonds proposal, I believe, can be a transformative opportunity for families and help give parents a sense of hope that their children will not suffer in poverty.

Transportation, Education, and Housing are the 3 biggest barriers I encounter preventing RI Works families from building success.

- Too many RI Works participants have job histories limited to the low skill jobs they can walk to because they did not have reliable transportation. A vehicle gives access to job markets across RI, as well as Massachusetts and Connecticut which are not otherwise accessible.

- We also see a lot of adults who feel stuck because they were not ready or able to follow a traditional path to education in their teen years, but are at a point in their lives where they are ready to learn. Finding a high-quality training or affordable college path that promises real success can be difficult without some financial support. Even a few thousand dollars for classes and materials is out of reach when you're struggling with basic survival.
- We can't predict what housing markets will look like in 20 years, but I can tell you that there are a lot of people who cannot hold consistent employment today because they don't have stable housing.

Families on RI Works do not receive enough money to save for the future. A \$3,000 investment on their behalf which can only be accessed by the child in whose name the investment was made only after the child reaches a certain age would guarantee that as a young adult a child born on RI Works isn't starting from zero. I cannot over-emphasize the impact that giving a real source of hope can have. The best days at my job are when someone tells me they are succeeding in a training or received an offer for a good job and you can see the horizons they are planning for expand. You have an opportunity to expand horizons with the measure before you today and I hope you will support the language as written.