

2026 -- S 2126

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S T A T E O F R H O D E I S L A N D

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES -- THE RHODE ISLAND WORKS PROGRAM

Introduced By: Senators DiMario, Lawson, Valverde, Murray, Zurier, Lauria, Acosta, Vargas, and Quezada

Date Introduced: January 16, 2026

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 40-5.2-20 of the General Laws in Chapter 40-5.2 entitled "The Rhode
2 Island Works Program" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **40-5.2-20. Childcare assistance — Families or assistance units eligible.**

4 (a) The department shall provide appropriate child care to every participant who is eligible
5 for cash assistance and who requires child care in order to meet the work requirements in
6 accordance with this chapter.

7 (b) **Low-income child care.** The department shall provide child care to all other working
8 families with incomes at or below two hundred sixty-one percent (261%) of the federal poverty
9 level if, and to the extent, these other families require child care in order to work at paid
10 employment as defined in the department's rules and regulations. The department shall also provide
11 child care to families with incomes below two hundred sixty-one percent (261%) of the federal
12 poverty level if, and to the extent, these families require child care to participate on a short-term
13 basis, as defined in the department's rules and regulations, in training, apprenticeship, internship,
14 on-the-job training, work experience, work immersion, or other job-readiness/job-attachment
15 program sponsored or funded by the human resource investment council (governor's workforce
16 board) or state agencies that are part of the coordinated program system pursuant to § 42-102-11.
17 Effective from January 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, the department shall also provide childcare
18 assistance to families with incomes below one hundred eighty percent (180%) of the federal poverty
19 level when such assistance is necessary for a member of these families to enroll or maintain

1 enrollment in a Rhode Island public institution of higher education provided that eligibility to
2 receive funding is capped when expenditures reach \$200,000 for this provision. Effective July 1,
3 2022 through December 31, 2024, the department shall also provide childcare assistance to families
4 with incomes below two hundred percent (200%) of the federal poverty level when such assistance
5 is necessary for a member of these families to enroll or maintain enrollment in a Rhode Island
6 public institution of higher education. Effective January 1, 2025, the department shall also provide
7 childcare assistance to families with incomes below two hundred sixty-one percent (261%) of the
8 federal poverty level when such assistance is necessary for a member of these families to enroll or
9 maintain enrollment in a Rhode Island public institution of higher education.

10 (c) No family/assistance unit shall be eligible for childcare assistance under this chapter if
11 the combined value of its liquid resources exceeds one million dollars (\$1,000,000), which
12 corresponds to the amount permitted by the federal government under the state plan and set forth
13 in the administrative rulemaking process by the department. Liquid resources are defined as any
14 interest(s) in property in the form of cash or other financial instruments or accounts that are readily
15 convertible to cash or cash equivalents. These include, but are not limited to: cash, bank, credit
16 union, or other financial institution savings, checking, and money market accounts; certificates of
17 deposit or other time deposits; stocks; bonds; mutual funds; and other similar financial instruments
18 or accounts. These do not include educational savings accounts, plans, or programs; retirement
19 accounts, plans, or programs; or accounts held jointly with another adult, not including a spouse.
20 The department is authorized to promulgate rules and regulations to determine the ownership and
21 source of the funds in the joint account.

22 (d) ~~As a condition of eligibility for childcare assistance under this chapter, the parent or
23 caretaker relative of the family must consent to, and must cooperate with, the department in
24 establishing paternity, and in establishing and/or enforcing child support and medical support
25 orders for any children in the family receiving appropriate child care under this section in
26 accordance with the applicable sections of title 15, as amended, unless the parent or caretaker
27 relative is found to have good cause for refusing to comply with the requirements of this subsection.~~

28 The parent or caretaker relative of any family applying for child care assistance may
29 voluntarily access the state's office of child support services for assistance establishing parentage,
30 establishing a child support and/or medical order, and enforcement of that order, but this shall not
31 be a requirement to qualify for or access child care assistance.

32 (e) For purposes of this section, "appropriate child care" means child care, including infant,
33 toddler, preschool, nursery school, and school-age, that is provided by a person or organization
34 qualified, approved, and authorized to provide the care by the state agency or agencies designated

1 to make the determinations in accordance with the provisions set forth herein.

2 (f)(1) Families with incomes below one hundred percent (100%) of the applicable federal
3 poverty level guidelines shall be provided with free child care. Families with incomes greater than
4 one hundred percent (100%) and less than two hundred percent (200%) of the applicable federal
5 poverty guideline shall be required to pay for some portion of the child care they receive, according
6 to a sliding-fee scale adopted by the department in the department's rules, not to exceed seven
7 percent (7%) of income as defined in subsection (h) of this section.

8 (2) Families who are receiving childcare assistance and who become ineligible for
9 childcare assistance as a result of their incomes exceeding two hundred sixty-one percent (261%)
10 of the applicable federal poverty guidelines shall continue to be eligible for childcare assistance
11 until their incomes exceed three hundred percent (300%) of the applicable federal poverty
12 guidelines. To be eligible, the families must continue to pay for some portion of the child care they
13 receive, as indicated in a sliding-fee scale adopted in the department's rules, not to exceed seven
14 percent (7%) of income as defined in subsection (h) of this section, and in accordance with all other
15 eligibility standards.

16 (g) In determining the type of child care to be provided to a family, the department shall
17 take into account the cost of available childcare options; the suitability of the type of care available
18 for the child; and the parent's preference as to the type of child care.

19 (h) For purposes of this section, "income" for families receiving cash assistance under §
20 40-5.2-11 means gross, earned income and unearned income, subject to the income exclusions in
21 §§ 40-5.2-10(g)(2) and 40-5.2-10(g)(3), and income for other families shall mean gross, earned and
22 unearned income as determined by departmental regulations.

23 (i) The caseload estimating conference established by chapter 17 of title 35 shall forecast
24 the expenditures for child care in accordance with the provisions of § 35-17-1.

25 (j) In determining eligibility for childcare assistance for children of members of reserve
26 components called to active duty during a time of conflict, the department shall freeze the family
27 composition and the family income of the reserve component member as it was in the month prior
28 to the month of leaving for active duty. This shall continue until the individual is officially
29 discharged from active duty.

30 (k) Effective from August 1, 2023, through July 31, 2028, the department shall provide
31 funding for child care for eligible childcare educators, and childcare staff, who work at least twenty
32 (20) hours a week in licensed childcare centers and licensed family childcare homes as defined in
33 the department's rules and regulations. Eligibility is limited to qualifying childcare educators and
34 childcare staff with family incomes up to three hundred percent (300%) of the applicable federal

1 poverty guidelines and will have no copayments. Qualifying participants may select the childcare
2 center or family childcare home for their children. The department shall promulgate regulations
3 necessary to implement this section, and will collect applicant and participant data to report
4 estimated demand for state-funded child care for eligible childcare educators and childcare staff.

5 The report shall be due annually to the governor and the general assembly by November 1.

6 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES -- THE RHODE ISLAND WORKS PROGRAM

- 1 This act would remove the requirement that families consent to, and cooperate with the
- 2 department of human services in establishing paternity and enforcing child and medical support
- 3 orders as a condition of eligibility for child care assistance.
- 4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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