



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: S-2459, Removing Child Support Enforcement from the Child Care Assistance Program (RI Works)

Senate Judiciary Committee

May 21, 2024

Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that will help families with young children.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support Senator DiMario's bill, S-2459, which would remove the statutory requirement for any applicant or participant in the RI Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to establish paternity or parentage and to pursue child support enforcement as an eligibility requirement for the program (this change is also proposed in Senator Cano's Child Care is Essential bill)

Most states have never imposed this requirement since no other program designed to support child development and early learning has this requirement in place. The federal government does not require or recommend this requirement.

We have been working with advocates across the U.S. to determine which states have this requirement in place as some states that were listed as having the requirement have not had the requirement in place for many years (including Connecticut which stopped in 2006 and New York which stopped in 2009). Mississippi ended the practice in 2023 and Michigan just announced they are ending the practice in 2024.

Using the federal database of state child care policies managed by the Urban Institute and confirming with state advocates and administrators, we believe **there are only 9 states that currently impose this outdated and burdensome requirement: Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wisconsin.**

Rhode Island added this requirement into the Child Care Assistance statute in 2006. National experts strongly recommend that states that have this requirement in place remove it, stating **"There is no evidence to suggest that child support enforcement in child care subsidy processes improves compliance or helps families gain access to additional funds to improve their financial security** and therefore does not justify this increased burden on families or staff in already strained systems. **Instead, the imposed sanctions often discourage families from accessing resources** and can result in infants and toddlers lacking access to quality child care programs with responsive caregivers, continuity of care, and an environment that is safe for young children to explore and learn."

Compliance often involves many "hoops" for family members to jump through, including establishing parentage (often through genetic testing),

identifying, and locating noncustodial parents, and providing private and often sensitive information. **This may require that parents attend court appointments and participate in multiple legal proceedings, which can take place over many years.** Some family structures mean that one child may be impacted while others in the family are not, further complicating access to child care and economic security for the entire family.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and for Senator DiMario's leadership on this issue.