

2022 -- H 7988

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

HOUSE RESOLUTION

RESPECTFULLY REQUESTING THE RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO USE ITS REGULATORY AUTHORITY TO IMMEDIATELY REDUCE FAMILY COPAYMENTS FOR THE CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Introduced By: Representatives Ruggiero, Diaz, Caldwell, McEntee, Morales, Kislak, Casimiro, Cassar, Williams, and Vella-Wilkinson

Date Introduced: March 16, 2022

Referred To: House Finance

1 WHEREAS, On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a
2 global pandemic, requiring rapid, necessary public health risk mitigation efforts around the world,
3 including Rhode Island; and

4 WHEREAS, The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in disruptions to workplaces, schools and
5 child care facilities throughout the State; and

6 WHEREAS, In the two years since that declaration, Rhode Island's early childhood
7 sector has experienced widespread instability, in part due to mandated facility closures,
8 decreasing enrollment throughout the pandemic, workforce shortages, and financial strain; and

9 WHEREAS, Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, child care providers in Rhode
10 Island's child care assistance program faced historically low reimbursement rates for their
11 services, particularly for infant and toddler care, that fell well below the federal equal access
12 standard, a national benchmark set to ensure all families have access to high-quality child care;
13 and

14 WHEREAS, Rhode Island families rely on the child care system in order to work, and to
15 ensure their children can develop, thrive and enter school ready to keep learning; and

16 WHEREAS, Child care is often the biggest household expense incurred by families;
17 according to Rhode Island Kids Count's most recent fact book, a Rhode Island family would need
18 to earn at least \$155,757 annually to afford the average yearly cost for a three-year-old placed in a
19 licensed child care center; and

1 WHEREAS, During the COVID-19 pandemic, the state used its administrative authority
2 to implement policies that would ensure child care providers could keep their doors open, and
3 parents could continue to afford care, all while implementing CDC guidance for keeping children,
4 workers, and families healthy; and

5 WHEREAS, One of those important policies was waiving family copayments in the child
6 care assistance program, while temporarily increasing reimbursement rates to providers to
7 simultaneously make child care more affordable for families and minimize the financial burden
8 placed on providers; and

9 WHEREAS, In February of 2022, the Department of Human Services notified child care
10 providers that beginning March 6, 2022, family copayments would be reinstated and providers
11 would be expected to collect weekly copayments directly from families; and

12 WHEREAS, Reinstating family copayments presents an immediate, unreasonable, and
13 unnecessary financial burden to families, particularly since children under the age of five are not
14 eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine and the CDC still recommends strict isolation and quarantine
15 guidance for child care facilities, leaving families with the likelihood that essential child care
16 services will not be consistently available in the event of additional COVID-19 cases and
17 exposure; and

18 WHEREAS, The financial burden put on families increases the risk that parents will be
19 forced to leave the workforce to care for children because they can no longer afford child care,
20 which will put further strain on Rhode Island businesses and the state's economic recovery; and

21 WHEREAS, Reinstating family copayments also presents an immediate risk to child care
22 providers, who cannot absorb the cost of unpaid copayments or withstand further enrollment
23 declines; now, therefore be it

24 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby
25 respectfully requests that the Rhode Island Department of Human Services use its regulatory
26 authority to immediately reduce family copayments for the Child Care Assistance Program to the
27 lowest sliding-scale rates legally allowable under federal and state law, and that those reduced
28 rates remain in place through June 30, 2022; and be it further

29 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
30 transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to His Excellency Governor Dan McKee, and to
31 Womazetta Jones, Secretary of the Executive of Office Health and Human Services, and to
32 Yvette Mendes, Interim Director of the Department of Human Services.

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