

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

**Testimony Re: S-2687 regarding the Rhode Island Works Program
 Senate Finance Committee**

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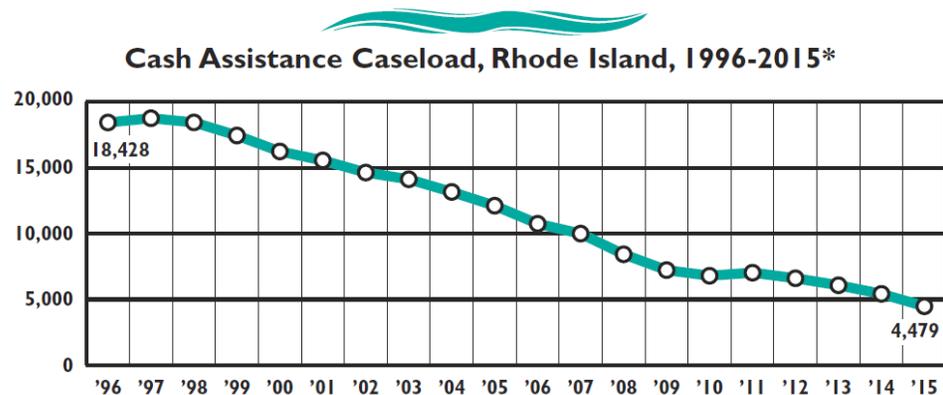
Stephanie Geller, Senior Policy Analyst

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 strong support for Senate Bill 2687. This bill would simplify the administration of the Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works), the state’s cash assistance program, by eliminating the periodic time limit.

Provide an Adequate Safety Net When Needed

As you know, in 2008, The Rhode Island Works Program (RI Works) replaced the Family Independence Program (FIP) and new time limits went into effect. Currently, families can receive assistance for no more than 24 months (whether consecutive or not) in any 60-month period and no more than 48 months in their lifetime. **The large majority of other states (37 states and the District of Columbia) have 60-month time limits, and only nine states, including Rhode Island, have a periodic time limit in addition to the lifetime time limit.**

As a result of changes in policies instituted when the program changed from FIP to RI Works, including the reduced time limit, Rhode Island’s cash assistance caseload has decreased by 55% since 2007. In December 2015, the program served only 4,479 families, down from 9,993 in 2007. **In 2014, 19,151 children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty, yet only 7,675 received cash assistance in 2015.** Repealing the 24/60 periodic time limit and having a single time limit of 48 months would provide families with the support they need during difficult economic times.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Human Services, InRhodes Database, December 1, 1996-2015.

Simplify Administration

Currently, families can apply for hardship extensions that allow them to continue receiving cash assistance after reaching their time limit, but these hardship extensions must be renewed initially after six months and then every three months. Eliminating the periodic time limit would reduce the need for hardship extensions and simplify the administration of the RI Works Program. Overburdened workers would no longer have to process hardship extension requests every few months for families who are over the periodic time limit but who still cannot find employment. They could instead focus on helping families, prepare for, get, and keep the jobs they need to provide for their own families.

Provide Continuity for Parents and Children

Eliminating the 24-month periodic time limit would also provide more continuity for parents by allowing them to continue participating in job readiness, education, and training programs that are preparing them for employment. It would also help ensure that young children can remain continuously enrolled in a high-quality child care program.

The RI Works Program is intended to serve as a safety net for children whose parents are unable to work due to a temporary or permanent disability, who are not eligible for unemployment benefits due to insufficient earnings or work experience, or who earn less than the poverty level. We support this bill because it would:

- (1) Help to strengthen the safety net for Rhode Island families that need it the most
- (2) Provide the continuity that parents and children need
- (3) Simplify the administration of the program

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT encourages the General Assembly to examine this issue and consider making this change during the upcoming session.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is committed to working with the General Assembly and the Department of Human Services to develop and implement policies that protect vulnerable children and families.