



February 3rd, 2025

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara, Chair

House Education Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 5338 – Relating to Education –
Health & Safety of Pupils**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for House Bill 5339, which advances equitable access to high-quality education. Through the ACHIEVE UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we are committed to ensuring that every child has the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed from early childhood through post-secondary education.

United Way Rhode Island (UWRI) strongly supports the proposed bill requiring each school system in the state to employ at least one certified school psychologist for every 500 students. Mental health is an essential component of a student's overall well-being and academic success, and this bill helps ensure that all students have access to the psychological support they need. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in five children in the U.S. experience a mental health condition each year, yet only 20% receive the necessary treatment. By requiring certified school psychologists, this bill will help bridge the gap between students' mental health needs and available services, particularly in underserved communities where mental health resources are often scarce.

Research has shown that the presence of school psychologists can significantly improve students' mental health outcomes, behavior, and academic performance. A study by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that students who have access to school-based mental health services show improved academic achievement and lower rates of absenteeism. This bill aligns with growing recognition of the importance of mental health support in schools, especially as students face increasing pressures from social, academic, and economic challenges. UWRI believes that by implementing this policy, Rhode Island will foster a healthier, more supportive learning environment for all students, which in turn will contribute to stronger academic and life outcomes.

Investing in education is an investment in Rhode Island's future. House Bill 5339 will help ensure that all students—especially those in historically underserved communities—have the tools they need to thrive in school and beyond. By advancing equitable K-12 education policies, we can break cycles of poverty and create a pathway to long-term success for the next generation. We respectfully urge your support for this

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legislation to build a more just and prosperous Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

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United Way of Rhode Island

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