



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. 5339 – Relating to Education –
Certification of Teachers**

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—regardless of background—has the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed from early childhood through post-secondary education.

United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) supports suspending the requirement for standardized teacher certification exams until July 1, 2027. This measure is crucial for addressing the teacher shortage in Rhode Island, which is exacerbated by rigid certification requirements that may discourage qualified individuals from entering the profession. According to a 2023 report by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), nearly 30% of teaching positions in the state were unfilled or filled by out-of-field teachers, particularly in high-need subjects such as science and special education. By removing the barrier of standardized testing, the bill provides a timely solution to attracting and retaining talent in the teaching workforce, especially when there is an urgent need for educators.

In addition, research has shown that standardized tests are not necessarily predictive of teaching effectiveness. A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) found that factors such as hands-on teaching experience and subject-area knowledge are far stronger indicators of teacher success than standardized test scores. This bill aligns with the growing recognition that a more flexible approach to teacher certification can increase access to quality educators, especially in underserved communities. By suspending standardized testing requirements, UWRI believes that this legislation will help build a more inclusive and effective education system in Rhode Island, where the

Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders

focus is on equipping teachers with the practical skills needed for success in the classroom rather than relying on test scores alone.

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 legislation to build a more just and prosperous Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Dana DeMaire

Community Impact & Education Policy Intern

United Way of Rhode Island