



March 4, 2025

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara, Chair

House Committee on Education

Rhode Island State House

Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL NUMBER 5339 – AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION –
CERTIFICATION OF TEACHERS

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for House Bill 5539, 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.

House Bill 5539 is a critical step in addressing educational disparities by investing in targeted programs that enhance student learning, provide additional support for multilingual learners, and strengthen academic and workforce success pathways. Expanding access to equitable education ensures a brighter future for Rhode Island’s children and a stronger economy for our state.

Waiving fees for teacher certification and additional credentials is a strategic approach to alleviating the financial burdens that often deter qualified individuals from entering or remaining in the teaching profession. In Rhode Island, the application fee for an initial teaching certificate is \$100, with an additional \$50 for each extra certification area (BestColleges, 2024). These costs can be prohibitive, especially for educators seeking multiple certifications to better serve diverse student populations.

The nation is currently facing a significant teacher shortage, a challenge that is acutely felt in Rhode Island. This shortage is particularly pronounced among multilingual educators, despite the growing

[Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.](#)

diversity of our student body. Between 2010 and 2020, Rhode Island experienced a 22% increase in its Hispanic child population, while the non-Hispanic white child population declined by 22% (RI Kids Count, 2024). Despite this demographic shift, the teaching workforce has not kept pace in reflecting the cultural and linguistic diversity of our students. Promoting equity and diverse recruitment is essential to meet the needs of Rhode Island's evolving student demographics. By removing financial barriers associated with certification, we can attract a broader spectrum of educators, including those from underrepresented backgrounds. This not only enriches the educational experience for students but also contributes to workforce development and the economic stability of Rhode Islanders aspiring to educate our youth.

Investing in education is an investment in Rhode Island's future. House Bill 5539 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,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy