

## Testimony in Support of H7027

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Dr. Elizabeth Jacobs - I am a physician in the Pediatric Emergency Department at Hasbro Children's Hospital and the founder of HeartSAFE Schools Rhode Island in honor of my neighbor Bill Fullaway who died of a sudden cardiac arrest on his living room floor despite my best efforts to resuscitate him. Our mission is to collaborate and prepare schools to respond swiftly in the event of a sudden cardiac arrest on school grounds.

To begin – let me tell you about 2 real life stories that occurred in Rhode Island schools – the stories are very similar but have very different endings.

The first story is A 40-year-old teacher collapses in the front office at Kickimuitt Middle School in Warren. At first, people think he fainted. A few seconds pass. Then a minute. Someone runs to find help. Someone else calls 911. But there's no clear plan, no one knows where the AED is, and precious minutes are lost. By the time the substitute nurse arrives and begins CPR his chance of survival is less than 10% and he is pronounced dead at the hospital.

Now imagine the same moment — but with preparation. An athletic trainer at LaSalle Academy watches a 17 year old on the track field collapse – She checks a pulse - recognizes cardiac arrest and CPR starts immediately. An AED is retrieved within minutes and used. This child arrives at my ED sitting up and talking – he's now in college and will live a full and happy life. That difference is what this bill is about.

Each day 16 children under the age of 18 suffer a sudden cardiac arrest – that's over 5,000 kids a year and minutes do matter - when the heart stops, **every minute without action decreases survival by up to 10 percent – that means the window is only 10 minutes from a strong chance of survival to none.** We all saw what happened on national TV when Damar Hamlin collapsed on the field. He survived because trained responders, an AED, and a rehearsed emergency plan were already in place.

That level of readiness should not be reserved for professional athletes. **Every child in Rhode Island deserves the same chance of survival.**

This bill moves us from simply owning AEDs to actually being **ready to use them.** It requires cardiac emergency response plans, athletic emergency action plans, accessible AEDs, and trained staff — all evidence-based steps proven to save lives.

This is also an equity issue. Cardiac arrest does not care about zip code or school resources. This bill ensures that **every school community is prepared to act** when seconds matter most.

AEDs are affordable, safe, and often grant-funded. The true cost is not preparation — it's a preventable death.

This bill gives schools the tools, training, and plans they need to save a life before it's too late.

I urge you to support this bill. Thank you.