

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Elisa Almonte-Brown, and I am a board member and the former Founder and Director of the Beyond U Program from 2007 to 2020. This program is part of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21 CCLC) and is incorporated within the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP).

UCAP was established in 1989 by Rob DeBloise, driven by the belief that every student deserves a second chance to pursue learning in an environment that supports their holistic development. I had the privilege of working alongside Rob, exceptional educators, and many community members who were dedicated to empowering students who had previously felt disheartened by their educational and life experiences.

During my 13 years of service, UCAP supported thousands of inner-city youth. It became clear that the UCAP model is both unique and transformative. I witnessed firsthand the impact of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as we created a safe learning space for students, allowing them to express themselves in the presence of trusted adults who prioritized their well-being.

Not a year goes by without encountering a former student. Our conversations often start with, "That was my best school experience," and end with a wistful hope that Rob had opened a high school. They fondly remember their school-based projects with their English teachers, the invaluable social stories shared by their Math teachers, and the enjoyment of participating in a diverse range of after-school programs, weekend field trips, school vacation camps, and summer activities featuring prominent enrichment opportunities throughout Rhode Island.

Bill S-2208/H-7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and by providing clarity regarding governance and admission authority. This legislation aligns with the current educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families throughout Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge your support for this vital legislation.

Sincerely,

Elisa Almonte-Brown,  
Fund For UCAP Board Member  
Current Dean of Climate & Culture at The Hope Academy