

March 10, 2026

Subject: Support for S-2208/ H-7271: Strengthening UCAP for the Future

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee.

My name is Linda A. DeConti, LICSW and I am a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and a Certified School Social Worker in RI who is a supporter of the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP). I am writing in my capacity as a School Social Worker to express my strong support for the development and continuation of UCAP, which is a small, accelerated learning environment that was founded in 1989. This school has served students who need accelerated learning and a smaller, structured school setting.

Through my work supporting students with a wide range of social, emotional, and academic needs, I have observed that many students struggle, not because of a lack of ability, but because the structure of traditional classrooms does not adequately meet their learning profiles. Large class sizes, limited individualized attention, and rigid pacing can create significant barriers for students who require additional flexibility, relationship-based support, and targeted instruction. From a social-emotional and mental health perspective, schools such as UCAP can significantly reduce student stress, increase school engagement, and improve overall well-being. These outcomes not only support academic achievement but also promote healthier developmental trajectories for students who may be at risk of disengagement or dropout.

A small, structured learning environment offers an important alternative. These programs allow for lower student-to-teacher ratios, increased opportunities for individualized academic support, and stronger relationships between students and staff. For many students who have previously disengaged from school due to academic frustration, behavioral challenges, or emotional stressors, this type of setting provides the safety, predictability, and encouragement necessary for reengagement in learning. When students feel seen, supported, and understood, they are far more likely to participate in school, build positive relationships, and develop the resilience necessary for long-term success.

Accelerated learning opportunities within UCAP are particularly valuable. When students are able to work at a pace that acknowledges both their past challenges and their current potential, they often experience renewed confidence and motivation. Providing opportunities to recover credits, close academic gaps, and make meaningful progress can be transformative for students who may otherwise feel discouraged about their academic future.

For these reasons, I strongly support the continuation of UCAP as part of a comprehensive continuum of educational supports. Providing diverse pathways to success ensures that schools are able to meet the needs of all learners, particularly those who have not thrived within traditional educational models. S-2208/ H7271 strengthens UCAP's long-term sustainability by allowing additional districts to refer students and clarifying governance and admissions authority.

This legislation reflects today's educational landscape and ensures that UCAP remains a stable, accountable public option for families across Rhode Island.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting innovative and responsive educational programming that prioritizes student engagement, well-being, and academic success. I respectfully urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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