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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tim Hotchner. I am a 1995 graduate of Brown University, a documentary filmmaker, and a life-long advocate of Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program. I am writing in strong support of S-2208 / H-7271.

I first walked into UCAP as a twenty-year-old undergraduate looking for a story about an educator who was making a difference. What I found was something far more extraordinary: a school that had chosen, as its entire mission, to fight for the students everyone else had given up on.

At the head of that school was Rob DeBlois—a quadriplegic who knew something about overcoming adversity and who had built UCAP on a simple, radical premise: that a child who has been held back a grade is not a lost cause. That child is a candidate for acceleration. Rob is gone now, but that premise endures with Lynn Prentiss, and it has changed the lives of more than a thousand young people in Rhode Island.

After graduating from Brown, I moved back to Providence and spent over a year embedded at UCAP to direct a documentary called *Accelerating America*. The film follows three students—Jason, Yazmine, and America—through a make-or-break year at the school. I watched Jason, a boy who had been told he was stupid, discover that he was anything but. I watched Yazmine, who could not walk through a hallway without swearing at a teacher, end up in college studying criminal justice. And I watched America, a fourteen-year-old in foster care whose family had left the country without telling her, fight every day just to show up.

These are the students UCAP serves. Not the easy cases. Not the ones with two parents at home checking homework. The ones for whom getting to school each morning is, in itself, an act of courage.

For thirty-seven years, UCAP has been the last line of defense for these children. Its teachers do not micromanage; they coach. Its counselors spend their summers visiting students at home so they understand what each child carries into the classroom. The school runs after-school programs, Saturday school, vacation camps, and field trips—not because it has money to burn, but because these kids need more than a few hours of

academics to survive. And it works: UCAP graduates are significantly more likely to finish high school than their peers in the Providence schools.

I have spent my career telling stories about people and institutions that do hard things well. UCAP is the best example I have ever encountered. The idea that Providence would withdraw its students, and that this school—this irreplaceable school—could be allowed to disappear because of a structural funding gap is, to me, unconscionable.

S-2208 / H-7271 would modernize UCAP's enabling law, allow additional districts to refer students, and ensure that access to the school is based on student need. This is not a radical proposition. It is a practical one. It is the kind of legislation that keeps a proven institution alive so it can continue doing the work that no one else will do.

Rob DeBlois used to say that people of influence need to think of these kids as *their* children—not other people's children. I have carried that with me for thirty years. I respectfully urge you to carry it into your vote.

I urge your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Tim Hotchner
Director, *Accelerating America*
Brown University, Class of 1995
Woodbury, CT