



April 19, 2023

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Committee on Finance
State House Room 35
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H-5200, Governor's Budget Amendment 9 - The Hope Scholarship Pilot Program, and and H-5099 - The Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Pilot Program Act

Dear Chairman Abney,

I am writing to request that the two current Hope Scholarship proposals: H-5200 (budget amendment 9) and H-5099, be expanded to include the University of Rhode Island.

All Rhode Island students and families deserve choice in their pursuit of higher education and access to the University of Rhode Island, the state's flagship public research university. Ensuring that all Rhode Islanders have the opportunity to pursue a degree and eventually a satisfying career, has a direct and positive impact on the state's workforce and economy. Both of the current proposals for the Hope Scholarship program, H-5200 and H-5099, limit access and, although unintended, discourage Rhode Islanders from pursuing the degrees and career paths that are offered at URI.

The University of Rhode Island offer's unique bachelor's degrees in key labor markets for the state, including engineering, neuroscience, AACSB-accredited business programs, data science, marine biology, environmental science, aquaculture and fisheries, pharmacy, biotechnology, and more. URI graduates are also the backbone of Rhode Island's 21st century workforce, graduating and pursuing jobs in all areas of the economy, including the Blue Economy. Our graduates are contributing meaningfully to their communities and the state by joining companies like CVS Health, Lifespan Corp, General Dynamics Electric Boat, Raytheon, and Providence Public Schools, and an impressive 90% of our students are employed, or in graduate school, six months after graduation.

Counter to national trends, URI boasts enhanced retention and degree completion. The University has earned national recognition for its innovative approaches to increase degree completion by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). Since 2008, first-year retention has increased from 78% to 85%; four-year graduation rate has improved from 38% to 53%; six-year rate from 60% to 69%; and the time to degree on average is just over four years.

The University has made a sustained commitment to providing support to all our students, even during difficult fiscal times. This dedication has resulted in a 133% growth in the Hispanic student population;

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an increase of 19% in the Black student population; an increase of 38.5% in our Asian student population, and an impressive 80% in two or more races over the past decade.

Additionally, URI is an active partner in the Rhode Island Higher Education System, working closely with the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) and Rhode Island College (RIC) on initiatives to foster greater student success and degree completion. Currently, there are over 70 transfer plans that support students transferring from CCRI to URI. The vast majority of classes transfer as a general education or major requirement. In the 2022-2023 academic year, URI held 31 in-person transfer information sessions at CCRI.

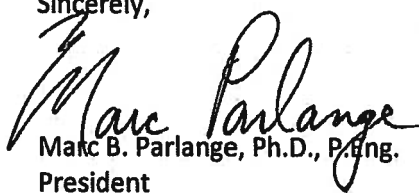
The University of Rhode Island also offers wraparound services, support, and resources that students need to succeed. URI has made investments in the following programs and initiatives that have resulted in enhanced retention and degree completion:

- Development of four-year degree maps;
- Winter J-Term and enhanced summer sessions;
- Professional advisors;
- New flexible general education program;
- Creation of a 40+ member University-wide Student Success Team;
- Expanded tutoring and academic support;
- Enhanced first-year gateway courses.

A hallmark of these wraparound services at URI is our Talent Development (TD) Program, launched in 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The TD program offers Rhode Island's high school graduates of color and those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds a pathway to URI. TD provides year-round academic tutoring, career counseling, mental health and cultural support all working towards degree completion. Talent Development scholars find great success at URI, with an average degree completion rate of 4.62 years. TD currently has over 1,100 scholars and boasts over 4,000 alumni. Most notably, the University financially supports all admitted TD program students.

URI offers unique degrees in key areas of our economy and provides the necessary wraparound services to ensure student success and completion. **All Rhode Islanders deserve access to the state's flagship public research university** and I urge you to expand the current Hope Scholarship Pilot Program proposals to include the University of Rhode Island as an eligible institution. This expansion will achieve our shared objective: To increase college degree attainment by offering ALL students access, opportunity, and choice in their pursuit of higher education.

Sincerely,


Marc B. Parlange, Ph.D., P.Eng.
President