



50 Valley Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02909
(401) 444-0600 | www.unitedwayri.org



March 7, 2024
Hon. Marvin Abney, Chair
And Members of the House Finance Committee
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF House Bill No. 7225, MAKING APPROPRIATIONS OR THE SUPPORT OF THE STATE FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2025, ARTICLE 8: EDUCATION

As a member of the world's largest nonprofit network, United Way of Rhode Island is proud to bring together individuals, businesses, nonprofit, community leaders and government to tackle the root causes of inequity and achieve specific, measurable goals. A priority of United Way of Rhode Island is to prioritize the health and safety of children to help them succeed in school through the support of high-quality education programs in early childhood, elementary, middle, secondary school and out-of-school time programs. To advance our initiative of supporting all Rhode Island youth, United Way of Rhode Island is in strong support of *House Bill 7225, Article 8: Relating to Education*, and the efforts to provide free and nutritious lunch and breakfast for all public students.

Now more than ever, it is crucial all public schools provide healthy free breakfast and lunch to all enrolled and attending students daily! Over the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen how food and financial insecurity undermine the safety, educational, and economic outcomes of our low-income families. In 2021, United Way 211 saw 114,168 calls for food assistance and over 300,000 calls for assistance with other basic needs such as housing, transportation, utilities, and healthcare. To address these data points and support healthy well-being, youth not only need free nutritious meals, but they also need access to comprehensive nutrition learning opportunities to understand and obtain healthy life skills. A recent Center for Disease Control and Prevention policy brief, [*Opportunities for Nutrition Education in US Schools*](#), attributes healthy growth and youth development outcomes experienced by youth to consistent nutritious meals and access to nutrition education. Comprehensive nutrition education empowers children and youth with the knowledge and skills to make healthy eating choices and improve daily habits. In tandem, free healthy meals and nutrition curriculum work to best support the development of healthy youth life skills and allow youth to remain focused on school instead of their next meal.

All of our state's youth deserve opportunities to learn a high-quality public education curriculum that prepares them to live healthy lives. United Way respectfully requests your support for *House Bill 7225, Article 8: Relating to Education*, and continue to work to support our state youth.

Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.





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Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cortney Nicolato".

Cortney Nicolato

President and CEO

Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.

