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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. 7400 AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION — FEDERAL AID

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 7400, Relating to Education, Federal aid* 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 7400, Relating to Education Federal Aid* and continue to work to support our state youth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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





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Sincerely Yours,

Cortney Nicolato

Cortney Nicolato

President and CEO

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