



April 28, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island Statehouse  
Providence, 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 5400-- A N A C T RELATING TO LIBRARIES -- STATE AID TO LIBRARIES

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we are writing to express our support for House Bill 5400, recognizing that access to education, workforce development resources, and community infrastructure—such as public libraries—is essential for economic mobility and long-term financial stability. A core priority of our Achieve United initiative is ensuring that all Rhode Islanders of every background have equitable access to education, training, and career pathways necessary to secure meaningful employment and family-sustaining wages.

House Bill 5400 is critical to strengthening Rhode Island’s workforce by maintaining and expanding access to public libraries, which serve as hubs for adult education, digital literacy, career readiness, and job search support. By investing in local libraries, this legislation will help individuals build the skills needed for sustainable careers while meeting employer demands in an increasingly technology-driven economy.

Libraries are more than repositories of information—they are gateways to opportunity, particularly for underserved communities. According to the American Library Association, 73% of public libraries help patrons with job applications and interviewing skills, underscoring their critical role in workforce development (American Library Association, 2023). Expanding stable funding for libraries ensures that all Rhode Islanders—particularly those facing barriers to employment—have access to tools, training, and resources needed to thrive.

At the center of this effort is our support for serving each Rhode Islander with the resources they require to achieve their fullest potential. Ensuring public libraries remain fully funded and accessible helps break down barriers to employment and education for multilingual learners, low-income

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

families, seniors, and communities of every color.

Strengthening Rhode Island's workforce and educational access through House Bill 5400 aligns with our commitment to economic mobility, fairness, and long-term prosperity. By investing in our public libraries, we can ensure that job seekers, adult learners, and families have access to critical resources for education, skill-building, and career advancement.

We respectfully urge your support for House Bill 5400 to secure the future of library-based workforce development, strengthen career pathways, and expand access to education and opportunity for all Rhode Islanders. The United Way of Rhode Island remains committed to working alongside policymakers, educators, libraries, and community organizations to ensure every individual has the tools and opportunities needed to succeed.

Sincerely,

**Ellijah McLean**

Manager, Government Relations & Policy

United Way Rhode Island