



Tuesday, April 28, 2025

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in strong support of the BOOST Bill, HB5976. At Young Voices, we are deeply committed to the success and well-being of Rhode Island's youth. We recognize that what happens outside of the classroom is just as critical as what happens inside it—and that's where out-of-school time (OST) programs play a vital role.

What is OST and Why It Matters

Out-of-school time encompasses afterschool and summer learning programs that promote academic enrichment, social-emotional learning, health and wellness, workforce readiness, and engagement in STEM and the arts. These programs are not just extracurricular—they are essential learning environments that help young people build confidence, stay engaged, and thrive both in school and in life.

OST programs prepare our youth for the future by connecting learning to real-world skills and experiences. They are safe, structured spaces where students can explore interests, build relationships, and gain tools for lifelong success. Unfortunately, for every student in Rhode Island who has access to these life-changing programs, there are at least three more waiting for a spot. Too many of our communities are considered "OST deserts"—areas where no affordable, accessible programs exist.

Why the BOOST Bill is the Solution

The BOOST Bill represents a bold, bipartisan commitment to equity, opportunity, and long-term investment in youth development. It complements Governor McKee's Learn365RI initiative by treating OST as essential infrastructure, deserving of sustained and strategic public investment.

Specifically, the BOOST Bill will:

- **Expand access** in communities that currently lack affordable OST programming
- **Support workforce development** through training and credentialing of OST educators
- **Strengthen school-community partnerships**, ensuring a more connected and comprehensive support system for students
- **Advance continuous quality improvement** and data-driven impact measurement
- **Fund targeted programming** in STEAM, social-emotional learning, and career exploration



Why Now?

Rhode Island's young people are still grappling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic—challenges like increased mental health needs, academic setbacks, and feelings of disconnection. OST programs are a proven solution for re-engaging youth, improving school attendance, supporting families, and closing equity gaps.

With this bill, we have the opportunity to make a meaningful, long-term difference in the lives of tens of thousands of children across our state.

At Young Voices, we have seen the positive results of providing access and opportunities to afterschool programs in the success of our alumni. As a result of these opportunities, 100% of our alums have graduated from high school, with all gaining acceptance into a two- or four-year college or university. More than 80% have gone on to earn an associate or bachelor's degree, and a number have even achieved their PhDs. Their success extends beyond academics—our alumni are thriving in the workforce, contributing across all sectors of our economy.

We urge you to support the BOOST Bill and invest in a stronger, more inclusive future for all Rhode Island youth.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to our communities.

Sincerely,

Peter Chung
Executive Director