



Memo To: House Finance Committee

From: Angela Lima, Policy and Advocacy Program Director, Women's Fund of Rhode Island

Date: Apr 29, 2025

Concerns: **SUPPORT FOR H-6045**

**We at the Women's Fund of Rhode Island stand in support for H-6045 Mandates public schools (K-12) have one full-time certified social worker for every 250 students and allocates \$2 million in the fiscal year 2025 budget for school districts and municipalities to hire additional social workers.**

Rhode Island's girls face a complex set of challenges-ranging from disparities in education, mental health crises, and systemic inequities, to interpersonal violence and limited access to critical resources. Yet, their resilience and potential provide incredible opportunity for positive change.

According to our [Girls report](#):

- 43% of middle school girls reported being bullied on school property, with a noticeable rise in instances in 2023
- 10% of high school girls reported being physically forced to have sex
- 7% of high school girls reported experiencing dating violence
- Girls are 2X's more likely than boys to experience chronic depression and engage in suicidal ideation
- Regardless of school age status, girls were more likely than boys to consider and attempt suicide. Nearly 1 in 3 middle school girls seriously considered suicide, with 13% attempting suicide
- The ratio of school psychologists(713:1) and counselors (374:1) to students is above the minimum recommended levels, which are 500:1 for school psychologists and 250:1 for both social workers and counselors.

Having school ratios for social workers to students is important because it helps ensure students receive adequate support for their social-emotional needs, academic success, and mental health. Appropriate ratios allow social workers to effectively address student challenges, connect them with resources, and collaborate with other school staff to create a supportive learning environment.

In addition to emphasizing the school social worker's role and expertise in providing mental health intervention, these standards of practice should include recommendations on student to social worker ratios in schools. We at the Women's Fund of Rhode Island acknowledge that our social workers are completely overwhelmed. School social workers are often the first line and, unfortunately, sometimes the only line of support for our students and families as they navigate mental health crises in a completely overburdened system.

Schools help promote the mental health and well-being of students through education, prevention, and early intervention. Schools can reach a large number of youth with strategies that can lessen the effect of negative experiences and improve students' health and well-being.

**We urge you to support H-6045 to help address the mental health crisis our children face.**

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The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research, and strategic partnership designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. Our [Women's Well-Being Index](#) compares how well women fare against men on topics related to health, safety, economic security, education and civic participation in every RI city/town. Our [policy briefs](#) are written in response to the data found on the Index. You can find more about our work at [www.wfri.org](http://www.wfri.org).