



Mayor of Providence

Brett P. Smiley

April 29, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence RI, 02903

Dear Chair Abney and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill 6045, *An Act Relating to Education – The Educational Equity and Property Tax Relief Act*. If passed, this legislation will require all K-12 public schools to have at least one full-time school social worker for every 250 students and will provide \$2 million in funding for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to hire additional social workers in the FY2026 budget.

H6045 will ensure that students attending public schools across Rhode Island receive the mental and behavioral health support they need from licensed school social workers throughout their K-12 education. In 2022, the General Assembly passed legislation allowing recent Master of Social Work graduates to work in the field as they obtain their state social work licenses. This bill is the next step toward increasing the number of licensed social workers statewide, with a focus on school social workers. H6045 will equitably invest in school social workers at LEAs across Rhode Island and provide much-needed funding to help local school districts fill and sustain these critical positions.

Supporting students' social-emotional learning and addressing their mental and behavioral health needs has emerged as a priority in my conversations with students, families, and educators in Providence. The number of students who need social and emotional support has increased significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Without an adequate number of social workers at each school, educators are left to both teach and meet students' social and emotional needs. These increasing demands have contributed to educator burnout, and many educators have left for positions outside public school districts.

This bill takes critical steps to address the shortage of school social workers and provides essential state funding to support these positions as LEAs develop budgets without the benefit of COVID-19 relief funds. If passed, it will help Providence increase the number of social workers in our elementary, middle, and high schools, and will ensure our students receive the mental and behavioral health support they need and deserve.

I commend Representative Shallcross-Smith for her leadership in this critical area and respectfully urge the committee to vote in favor of this legislation.

Sincerely,


Brett P. Smiley
Mayor

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