



April 28, 2025

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

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 6045 -- RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE EDUCATIONAL
EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we are writing to express our strong support for **House Bill 6045**, recognizing that access to school-based social, emotional, and mental health supports is essential to academic achievement, student well-being, and long-term economic mobility. A core priority of our **Achieve United** initiative is ensuring that all Rhode Islanders, regardless of background, have equitable access to the learning environments and support systems—both inside and outside the classroom—that enable them to thrive from early childhood through post-secondary education. Investing in certified school social workers, creates the conditions necessary for every child to reach their fullest potential, strengthen school communities, and build a more resilient Rhode Island for generations to come.

House Bill 6045 is a critical step in addressing educational disparities. It invests in targeted support services by requiring every public school to maintain at least one full-time, certified school social worker for every 250 students, helping to enhance student learning environments, better serve multilingual learners, and strengthen academic and workforce success pathways. Expanding access to school-based social-emotional supports ensures a brighter, healthier future for Rhode Island's children and a stronger foundation for our state's economic and social wellbeing.

Students' ability to succeed academically is closely tied to their social, emotional, and mental health needs being met. According to the **2024 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook**, **one in three high school students in Rhode Island reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks**—a figure that highlights the urgent need for accessible mental health and emotional support services in schools (RI Kids Count, 2024).

[Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.](#)

Nationally, the **National Association of Social Workers (2023)** recommends a ratio of one school social worker per 250 general education students to provide effective prevention and intervention services (National Association of Social Workers, 2023). House Bill 6045 aligns with this best practice and would provide Rhode Island students with critical access to supports that foster academic achievement, emotional resilience, and long-term success.

By establishing a clear investment in school-based social work, Rhode Island would not only help address the rising mental health challenges facing youth, but also promote school safety, improved attendance, greater family engagement, and stronger community ties.

Investing in education is crucial for the future of Rhode Island. House Bill 6045 aims to ensure that all students—particularly those from underserved communities that have received less than their fair share of resources—receive the emotional and academic support they need to thrive.

By promoting K-12 education policies tailored to the individual needs of each student, we can break the cycles of poverty, close achievement gaps, and create pathways to long-term success for the next generation. We respectfully urge your support for this legislation to help build a more just, healthy, and prosperous Rhode Island

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy

United Way Rhode Island