

To: House Finance Committee

From: Lisa Barksdale, Resident Musician and Program Coordinator for Community MusicWorks, Women's Policy Institute member

Date: 04/29/2025

Re: In Support of HB6045, titled AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

I'm writing in enthusiastic support for H6045, which would require every public school to have one social worker on staff for every 250 students and would allocate \$2M for this purpose.

I write to you as a parent and a teacher in a Providence-based after-school music program, Community MusicWorks. In my decade-plus years of teaching here, I have encountered so many truly extraordinary children who attend our Public Schools. Our students are also facing many challenges, and they deserve schools that prioritize their whole wellbeing. Without that care and attention to their mental and physical wellbeing there will be limits on the academic achievements possible for them. The support that school Social Workers provide is important and unique, and I believe increasing our investment in our Rhode Island schools' social workers is a vital step towards ensuring our students and schools can reach their full potential.

Back in 2022, an elementary school-aged violin student confided in me that she was having severe anxiety and was experiencing what sounded to me like panic attacks. Knowing that treating anxiety was outside the realm of my own experience and qualifications, my first step was to ask her if there was someone at her school, like a social worker, who she could turn to for guidance. Fortunately, there was, and thanks to the presence of that social worker, she was able to find guidance quickly. Had that person not been there, she would have faced a more difficult uphill battle, and I worry that during that time, her anxiety could have taken her down a dark path and her performance in school undoubtedly would have suffered.

This is just one of many students I've encountered who I felt needed support beyond what I could provide. Thankfully, it's a positive story, an example of how things can go right, but for too many students in our schools, I fear the story unfolds differently. The presence or lack of a social worker in a school can have significant ripple effects going beyond the individual students and into the school community and beyond. I strongly urge the House Finance Committee to recognize the vital importance of social work in our schools and to pass H6045.

Sincerely,
Lisa Barksdale