

## Testimony in Support of House Bill 6045

House Finance Committee Hearing on Tuesday, April 29, 2025

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to you as a resident of Providence, a registered voter, a mother, and a survivor of a traumatic childhood. I am 53 years old and didn't start addressing the pain, shame and self-directed (and misdirected) guilt I carried for most of my life as a result of physical, emotional and sexual abuse as a child. I support the revisions to House Bill 6045, requiring 1 social worker for every 250 students and providing the \$2M in funding requested because I don't want anyone to have to carry their pain for as long as I did. Social workers in schools can help make this possible.

Whitney Houston famously sang, "I believe the children are our future. Treat them well and let them lead the way." This message resonates with us all. It's a powerful reminder of the truth that children are indeed our future, and that it is our responsibility to nurture and support them.

I am sure you agree that children need stability in their homes, safety and protection in their lives, and emotional and academic support as they grow. I don't believe I've met anyone, elected officials included, who doesn't recognize the value in investing in our children.

Yet, despite our collective understanding of this, we are failing to make the necessary investments. We are facing a nationwide mental health crisis, with children being hit the hardest. We hear heartbreaking stories of children as young as 9 years old struggling with suicidal thoughts. We know the problem is serious, yet we aren't doing enough to prevent it.

In Rhode Island, nearly every school district is far out of proportion with the recommended minimum ratio of one social worker for every 250 students.

This is not new information. The mental health crisis has been growing for at least a decade while nearly every school in RI has a social worker to student ratio of 1/600+. Yet, here we are, still struggling with mental health issues among our youth, still proclaiming that we care, but not providing the resources or funding necessary to address the crisis.

We need social workers in schools. Children need access to trusted adults who can offer support in moments of need or crisis. They need someone who knows them well enough to notice when something is wrong. Social workers are essential to building relationships that foster trust and safety for our kids.

We can pass bills requiring school districts to meet the ratio of one social worker for every 250 students, but without adequate funding, such measures will become just another unenforced mandate on the books. That would be a missed opportunity and any further delays will make matters worse.

We must do right by our children. Investing in them will create a better world for all of us—now and in the generations to come. The upfront costs of providing the necessary resources will save us money in the long run and, more importantly, it will show our children that we truly care about their well-being. For too long, we've spoken about how important children are, but now is the time to prove it with action and funding.

Thank you for your consideration,

