

**To: House Finance Committee**

**From:** Rebekah Gomez, Executive Director Conexin Latina Newport, Member of the Women's Policy Institute

**Date:** 04/27/2025

**Re:** In Support of House bill 6045, titled AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT

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Dear Chairman Abney and esteemed members of the house finance committee.

My name is Rebekah Gómez and I am writing in support of bill H6045. I am a graduate of the RI college of Social Work, and spent 18 years doing family outreach in the Newport public schools, so I am intimately familiar with children and the school system. I am currently the executive director of an organization called Conexin Latina Newport that works with Hispanic families on Aquidneck island to build access and power, and with local organizations to break down equity barriers and change systems. I am here to advocate for Latino students and families, particularly newcomers to the US, who are at increased risk for debilitating mental health conditions and would greatly benefit from the positive outcome of this bill.

If you have not had the opportunity to meet a child that is newly arrived to the US, allow me to paint you a picture. Not all, but many are withdrawn, don't speak or make eye contact, and in general, appear to be in shock and/or traumatized. Over time, and left untreated, this often turns into misbehavior in elementary school, defiance in middle school, and withdrawal and failure in high school, and frequently results in the discovery of serious trauma.

For many of our children, school becomes the most consistent and safe environment they have experienced, and if sufficiently staffed might be their only opportunity to receive consistent mental health intervention from a social worker that they can build a trusting relationship with. Alternatively, due to multiple systemic barriers and financial and employment stressors on parents, many of these students go without help, or end up in emergency rooms, which ends up being a costly alternative for the medical system and the state, not to mention a band aid solution for the student.

Having sufficient social workers to not only work with students, but also provide resources, support and education for the parents of these youth, could change the course of many lives, both emotionally and academically, and provide a much needed boost to our statewide education outcomes, and a reduction in emergency medical costs.

For these reasons, I strongly believe that having a 1/250 ratio of social workers to students, and providing districts with the funding to meet this requirement, is crucial to the mental stability and success of our most needy students, and the success of our schools. This is why I support H6045 and ask you to pass this legislation.

Sincerely

Rebekah Gomez  
Women's Policy Institute  
Executive Director, Conexin Latina