

**Testimony Re: HB 6045 & SB 250 AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION --  
THE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT –  
Social Workers in Schools**

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Dear Chairperson and Committee Members,

I am writing to offer my testimony on behalf of a cohort of clinicians and case managers serving on the Emergency Response Stabilization Service (ERSS) / Mobile crisis teams in Rhode Island. We support HB 6045 & SB 250, an act that would ensure the provision of one school social worker for every 250 children in Rhode Island. In our roles with mobile crisis, we have had the privilege—and the responsibility—of working closely with students, families, and school personnel during some of the most challenging moments in their lives. Our clinical experience has underscored the critical need for robust, accessible mental health services within our schools.

Over the past several years, I have witnessed firsthand the escalating mental health challenges facing our youth. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that nearly one in five children experiences a mental health disorder annually. Additionally, studies from the American Academy of Pediatrics reveal that pediatric mental health crises have increased significantly—by over 30% in some regions—since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These trends not only strain our emergency services but also disrupt academic achievement and the overall well-being of our students.

The current student-to-social worker ratios in many Rhode Island schools far exceed the recommended levels. Research consistently demonstrates that lower ratios, such as the mandated 1:250, are associated with improved student outcomes, reduced absenteeism, and more timely interventions during crises. From a clinical perspective, I have observed that schools equipped with adequate social work support are better able to de-escalate critical situations, connect families with essential resources, and foster an environment of early intervention and preventive care.

Furthermore, the benefits of such an investment extend beyond immediate crisis management. With a dedicated school social worker available for every 250 students, we can build meaningful relationships that promote long-term mental health, reduce the incidence of emergency department visits, and ultimately contribute to a more equitable educational environment. This is particularly vital for underserved communities where access to mental health care is limited and the repercussions of unmet mental health needs can be most severe.

I respectfully urge you to consider the significant, lasting benefits that HB 6045 & SB 250 will offer our children and communities. Investing in mental health resources in our schools is an investment in the future of Rhode Island—a future where every child has the support they need to thrive both academically and emotionally.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Thomas Rodrigues LCSW, QMHP*