

Chairman Abney  
House Finance Committee

29 April, 2025

### Support of H6045

My name is Veronicka Vega and I'm a resident of Woonsocket and a Woonsocket High School alum. I'm testifying in support of H6045.

My family moved to Woonsocket after being homeless in Massachusetts. I was excited to finally have our own apartment but terrified of moving to an entirely new state for high school. I grew up in suburban Massachusetts so the learning environment was very different and the lack of funding very evident. I had to walk 4 miles a day to get to and from school, my family didn't have a vehicle and I wasn't over the 2.1 miles threshold to be eligible for a school bus.

I quickly fell into a depression and ended up missing a lot of school simply because of weather or lack of motivation to walk. It wasn't until I saw my primary care provider from Thundermist located in the nurse's office, that someone noticed my depression. She asked about my friends, family, grades and I was referred to the social worker. It was an awkward experience and she noted in my chart I might have adjustment disorder. I never went back to the social worker but I saw my PCP a lot due to vaccinations and check-ups and she always chatted with me to see how I was doing. Although I didn't need more help, I knew I had people to turn to if I needed it.

The reason that I'm supporting this bill is because of the increased need I see in my community for mental health support for youth. I have two sisters that are in elementary and middle school in Woonsocket. The things that I hear from them about what happens in school and what their friends are going through is deeply heartbreaking. From incarcerated parents, parents struggling with use disorders, and diagnoses of depression and anxiety. These kids are living through things that they shouldn't have to and it's taking a toll on their education and well-being.

School should be a safe space for children where they can get help if needed. In order for that help to be available schools need more social workers and funding. This bill will provide both. I was lucky enough to have visited my PCP who noticed I was struggling and was able to talk to someone right away. For many children that's not the case.

Thank you for your time,  
Veronicka Vega  
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