



April 31, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair

House Finance Committee

Rhode Island Statehouse

Providence, 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 5745 – The Student Success Act

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we are writing to express our strong support for House Bill 5745. We believe that access to postsecondary education and workforce development opportunities for everyone –regardless of immigration status—are crucial for economic mobility, community inclusion, and long-term financial stability. A core priority of our Achieve United initiative is to ensure that all Rhode Islanders, regardless of background, have inclusive access to the education, training, and career pathways necessary for securing meaningful employment and family-sustaining wages.

House Bill 5745 addresses outdated and exclusionary barriers by reducing the time required for certain undocumented students to qualify for in-state tuition rates at public higher education institutions in the state. The bill would allow this subset of students to reside in Rhode Island and qualify for in-state tuition in just six months, compared to the current three years. This change will allow more Rhode Island high school graduates to access affordable higher education, regardless of their documentation status. By Expanding access to public postsecondary institutions, this legislation will help our state cultivate the talent and potential of all students—an essential step toward building a stronger and more inclusive workforce.

This bill is particularly timely given the evolving demographics of Rhode Island. The state had the #1 growth in multilanguage learners between 2012 and 2020, and the 5th highest percent of MLL students across all states in 2020.

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education says that in the past 5 years, the MLL student population in RI has grown from 9.9% to 13.5%.

[Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.](#)

According to the 2024 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook, 77% of children aged 5 to 17 in RI live in households where English is the only language spoken. This would mean that 23% live in multilingual households; a figure that continues to grow each year. 69% of the MLL students in the class of 2023 graduated HS in 4 years, compared to 84% for all students. The same source cites postsecondary enrollment directly after high school for MLL students as only 41%, compared to 65% for all students. This bill aims to address this 24% gap.

These figures show that access to postsecondary education remains extremely low for multilingual individuals, especially for any immigrant or multilingual learners with scarce resources.

Shortening the residency requirements for in-state tuition is a cost-effective and student-centered solution that will increase college enrollment, foster greater civic engagement, and expand our future workforce.

Strengthening Rhode Island's workforce through House Bill 5745 aligns with our commitment to economic mobility, fairness, and long-term prosperity. Expanding access and removing barriers to affordable higher education will create a skilled and inclusive workforce that meets employer needs while opening doors of opportunity for all Rhode Islanders.

We respectfully urge your support for House Bill 5745, which will invest in workforce readiness, build inclusive career pathways, and empower all students to thrive. The United Way of Rhode Island remains committed to collaborating with policymakers, educators, and communities to ensure that everyone has the tools and opportunities needed to succeed.

Sincerely,

Ellijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy

United Way of Rhode Island