



To: House Committee on Finance

From: Erich Haslehurst

Date: May 15, 2025

Re: H5981 – RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE EDUCATION EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Finance Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the National Education Association Rhode Island and our 12,000 members to express our support for H5981, which proposes categorical state funding to support civics education in Rhode Island public schools, as introduced by Chairwoman June Speakman, for several reasons.

This funding is both timely and necessary. In 2021, the General Assembly passed the Civic Literacy Act, a landmark piece of legislation requiring all public school students to demonstrate proficiency in civics and complete a student-led civic project in order to graduate. This requirement, which began being implemented in the 2022-2023 school year, underscores Rhode Island's commitment to preparing students not only for college and career, but for active, informed participation in our democracy. Something that seems more important right now than it ever has.

However, implementing high-quality civics education—especially student-led projects that are authentic and community-based—requires resources. Our teachers need professional development. Schools need time, materials, and support to facilitate meaningful civic engagement. Without dedicated funding, the burden falls unevenly on schools and districts already stretched thin.

That is why this categorical funding is so important. It offers a mechanism to support the intent of the Civic Literacy Act and ensure that civics education is not just a mandate, but a fully supported priority.

At the same time, NEARI wants to stress that this legislation—while welcome—is not a substitute for broader reform. The General Assembly must revisit the education funding formula. Our current structure does not adequately reflect the real and rising costs of educating students in our most under-resourced communities. Categorical funding for civics is a helpful step, but a modernized, equitable funding formula is necessary to ensure all students, in all districts, have access to a high-quality education—including in civics.

For these reasons we urge you to pass H5981 and, in doing so, to commit to further action to ensure that Rhode Island's public schools are not only accountable for preparing our students for the future — but that they are also fully supported in doing so.

Sincerely,

Erich Haslehurst

National Education Association Rhode Island