

Dear Chairman Abney and Finance Committee Members,

My name is Anny Ortega, and I'm a teacher and an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. I'm writing to share my strong support for House Bills No. 5744 and 5982. As someone who has navigated life in a new country and now teaches students who face similar challenges, I deeply believe in the power of bilingual education.

When I first moved here, I faced the challenges of learning a new language and adapting to a different culture. It wasn't easy, but it gave me a unique perspective on how important language is, not just for communication, but for feeling seen, heard, and empowered. Today, as a teacher, I work with students who speak different languages at home, and I see how much they can achieve when we give them the right tools and support.

I support these bills because:

1. **Bilingual programs help all students succeed.** From my experience, bilingual programs are not just beneficial for multilingual learners, they help *all* students thrive. Research shows that these programs strengthen cognitive abilities and improve academic outcomes for both multilingual students and their English-dominant peers. I've seen firsthand how students in dual language programs develop a deep appreciation for different cultures and a love for learning.
2. **Multilingualism is an asset for Rhode Island's future.** As an immigrant, I know how important it is to be able to communicate in multiple languages in today's world. Employers are looking for workers with language skills—over 90% of them, in fact. By investing in bilingual education, we're preparing students for a future where they can contribute to the workforce, support local businesses, and strengthen our economy. This is something I feel strongly about as both an immigrant and a teacher.
3. **It's about equity and addressing teacher shortages.** Many of the multilingual learners in Rhode Island come from under-resourced communities, where access to quality education can be limited. This bill would expand access to bilingual programs in those areas and help address the teacher shortage by removing barriers for bilingual educators. As a teacher, I know how important it is to have educators who understand the challenges students face and who can support them in meaningful ways.

I hope you will consider the positive impact these bills will have, not just on our students, but on the future of Rhode Island. By supporting bilingual education, we're investing in the success of every student, regardless of their background.

Thank you for your time and for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

Anny Ortega.