



May 15, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House, 82 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Support for HB 5744 – An Act Relating to Education – Rhode Island Bilingual, Dual Language and World Language Teachers Investment Act of 2025; and House Bill 5982 – An Act Relating to Education -- Support and Access to Bilingual Education

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee,

I am the Managing Director of One Central Providence; my team convenes and serves as backbone to Central Providence Opportunities: A Health Equity Zone (CPO-HEZ), which is a member of the Coalition for a Multilingual RI. I am writing in strong support of two bills: House Bill 5744, the RI Bilingual, Dual Language and World Language Teachers Investment Act of 2025, sponsored by Representative Morales; and House Bill 5982, Support and Access to Bilingual Education, sponsored by Representative Felix. These bills would create a scholarship fund for teachers seeking a bilingual, dual language or world language certification and a \$300,000 fund to support the development and implementation of dual language programs in Rhode Island public schools serving multilingual learners.

According to RI KIDS Count's 2025 "Multilingual Learners" report, the percentage of multilingual students in Rhode Island increased from 7% during the 2012-2013 school year to 13% during the 2022-2023 school year. Yet, in October 2024, only 2% of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held an active Bilingual, Dual Language, or English to Speakers of Other Languages certification. Similarly, only 3% of these multilingual learners are enrolled in dual-language programs. Our state needs to do more to serve these students.

The members of CPO-HEZ, the 60+ organizations that collaborate across Central Providence, share a common goal: to improve the health, economic, and racial equity of residents of the 02908 and 02909 ZIP codes. We know that in any prospering neighborhood, we should prepare every young person to learn, and our systems should be ready to receive them. For multilingual students, that means having instruction from teachers that are certified in bilingual, dual language and world language instruction. For all students, whether or not they are already proficient in English, that means learning multiple languages. The members of CPO-HEZ have collectively agreed that these two bills are a priority for students in Central Providence, and throughout Rhode Island as a whole.

Rhode Island students and families deserve HB 5744 and HB 5982. Multilingual students are more likely to live in low-income households, and students in families with limited English proficiency also have a harder time accessing health care and other social services. Learning from teachers with relevant language-related certification and participating in dual language programs can improve reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for multilingual students. Research also shows that dual language programs benefit all students – not only do diverse ethnic and linguistic communities contribute to the social and economic prosperity of Rhode Island, but dual language programs have been shown to benefit native English-speaking children by enhancing cognitive skills and boosting academic achievement.

On behalf of CPO-HEZ, I strongly encourage the Committee to pass HB 5744 and HB 5982 to advance education for Rhode Island students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Anusha Venkataraman
Managing Director, One Central Providence, One Neighborhood Builders