

## **Testimony in Support of HB 5744 – Bilingual, Dual Language and World Language Teachers Investment Act**

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The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative Morales' HB 5744, which would authorize the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to establish a scholarship program to promote and increase the number of bilingual, dual language, and world language teachers in urban and urban ring schools. This bill would remove financial barriers to certification, allowing for a more diverse teacher pipeline.

All students deserve equal opportunities to learn, regardless of language barriers. Currently, Rhode Island is underinvesting in its multilingual learners. Between 2015 and 2023, Rhode Island's multilingual learner population had grown by 62.8 percent and had become 12.5 percent of the overall student population.<sup>1</sup> However, only 3 percent of multilingual learners were enrolled in dual language programs, while the rest were in English-only programs.

Dual language programs encourage students to engage with materials in two different languages. These programs embrace the culture of multilingual learners and encourage them to see their language skills as an asset.<sup>2</sup> Dual language programs have been shown to improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for multilingual students.<sup>3</sup> These improvements will not only help children, they will also strengthen our workforce.

To grow more dual language programs, the state must invest in recruiting more bilingual educators, especially given the current shortage of teachers. Rhode Island has a wealth of multilingual adults who need clear guidance and financial support to obtain teaching certificates, and the scholarship program in this bill would make that available.

HB 5744 would improve equity in Rhode Island by removing financial barriers for multilingual teacher certifications and increasing the diversity of Rhode Island's teaching population. The bill would also improve educational outcomes for multilingual learners, who tend to belong to historically marginalized communities.<sup>4</sup> The Economic Progress Institute strongly urges passage of HB 5744.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ripec.org/2023-multilingual-learner-funding/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/multilingual-learners\\_fb2024.pdf](https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/multilingual-learners_fb2024.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312265592\\_Bilingual\\_Education\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312265592_Bilingual_Education_in_the_United_States)

<sup>4</sup> <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/24677/promoting-the-educational-success-of-children-and-youth-learning-english>