

Dear Chairman Abney and Finance Committee Members,

My name is Maria Camacho, and I am writing in strong support of House Bills No. 5744 and 5982. I am a student and community member from Providence, and I care deeply about these bills.

I support this legislation because my own experiences as a multilingual learner and the support I received from teachers and educators have led me to pursue higher education at Brown University. As a first-generation American and college student, I was raised by parents who instilled in me the values of hard work, education, and a deep respect and love for our Latino culture.

Language has always been central to our family, preserving our connection to both relatives and cultural identity. Thanks to my parents' hard work and advocacy, my siblings and I were able to maintain the power of bilingualism. Today, our gift of language continues to support us academically, professionally, and personally.

I now volunteer as a tutor in local Providence Public Schools, where I've had the privilege of connecting with students from similar backgrounds. Seeing their excitement to share a language reminds me of my own experiences and affirms the benefits of bilingual education models, models that support Providence's students in becoming the next generation of engineers, doctors, and teachers.

These bills are necessary because they open doors of opportunity and affirm the potential of every student.

This bill matters because:

- Bilingual programs help all students succeed. Research shows that dual language programs lead to stronger academic outcomes—not only for multilingual learners, but also for English-dominant students. These programs close achievement gaps and promote advanced learning in two languages.
- Multilingualism is key to Rhode Island's future workforce. More than 90% of employers seek workers with language skills. Investing in bilingual education prepares students for real-world careers, supports business development, and strengthens the state's economy.
- It promotes equity and addresses teacher shortages. Multilingual learners in Rhode Island are primarily located in under-resourced districts. This bill expands access to high-quality programs in those communities and helps build a pipeline of qualified bilingual educators by removing certification barriers.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill and invest in the academic success, workforce readiness, and equitable opportunities of Rhode Island's multilingual students.

Thank you,
Maria Camacho