

House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903
Via email to: HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov

May 15, 2025

RE: House Bill 5981 - An Act Relating to Education - The Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act

Position: Support for Establishing a New Funding Category for Civics Education

Dear Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Perri Levis and I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and the Director of the Public Administration Program at Rhode Island College. I am also a member of the *RI Civic Learning Coalition* and a regional board member of the national non-profit *Generation Citizen*, which provides civics education and training to teachers and students across our country.

I support House Bill 5981 which, if passed, would create a new fund that dedicates monies towards giving students access to high quality civics education and to address the unfunded mandate of the **2021 Civics Literacy Act**, passed by the RI Legislature. House Bill 5981 would be used for comprehensive teacher professional development, curriculum development, student-led civics projects, community partnerships, and program evaluation.

I have spent the last 4 years teaching political science, public administration, and public policy classes to college students (at both the University of Rhode Island and at Rhode Island College), most of whom graduated from Rhode Island public schools. I teach courses in *American Government, Civic Learning & Community Engagement, Public Policy Analysis, and Budgeting and Grants Administration*. In all my undergraduate and graduate classes, I am continually baffled and deeply disturbed by the lack of basic knowledge about civics and democracy - from not understanding how our institutions of government work to not knowing how citizens can be involved in public sector decisions. This is the knowledge that I acquired in public middle and high school social studies courses and it provided the core foundation of how I became an active citizen in my community.

This moment in our country requires us to strengthen the basic systems and institutions of learning so that every child in our small state receives equal access to knowledge and information about civics and democracy – regardless of which town or city they live in. We only need to look across our border to Massachusetts to see how civic education funding leads to a more informed and engaged electorate. According to the Rhode Island Civic Learning Coalition's [2022 State of Civics Education in RI](#) report, more than 50% of RI students believe

that learning about civics now will be important for their future and they are very eager for these opportunities, but only 21% of administrators reported their school district had a civics course, and only 10% reported civics was a current priority for their district.

I urge you to quickly move this bill to a vote in favor of House Bill 5981. Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to provide some information. Please feel free to follow-up with me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Perri Leviss".

Perri Leviss, PhD
7 Maxfield Court
Barrington, RI 02806
(RI House District 67)