



House Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

May 15th, 2025

Re: Testimony in Support of H 5981- Establishing a new categorical funding category for civics education

Dear Chairperson Abney and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of H 5981, which would expand access to high-quality civics education to all Rhode Island students by establishing a categorical fund of \$1 million dollars dedicated towards civics.

Founded by two students at Brown in 2010, Generation Citizen is a leading national civic education nonprofit dedicated to providing hands-on, community-based civic education. We work to build our democracy by equipping and inspiring young people to be civically engaged in their local communities. Currently, Generation Citizen is working with over 5,500 students across seven districts in Rhode Island, and this year, we are collaborating with 75 teachers in the state.

Generation Citizen also helped to found the [Rhode Island Civic Learning Coalition](#) in 2020, which now includes 14 active organizations, students, and teachers. In 2021, we supported the passage of the [Civic Literacy Act](#), which took a crucial step towards assuring that Rhode Island students receive high-quality civic education by establishing a required half-credit in civics. This act gave students hands-on opportunities to learn how to gain and apply their knowledge of our system of federalism, make evidence-based claims, and tackle real-world problems at a local scale. Our extensive work in Rhode Island and across the country has me here today in support of H 5981 so that we can take the following steps to realize the initial promise of the Civic Literacy Act.

Civics has historically been woefully underfunded across the country. H 5981 would create a substantial and much-needed funding source through a categorical line item for comprehensive teacher professional development, curriculum development, student-led civic projects, community partnerships, and program evaluation. [Currently, federal funding for civic education is less than 50 cents per student, compared to \\$54 for STEM. Before 2023, federal funding for civics was about 10 cents per student.](#) At the state level, [15 states offer some type of funding for civic education programs, with 3 providing only a one-time funding source.](#) Other states vary in how much money they direct and the specific programs and areas they direct money towards, such as teacher professional development vs money for agencies to implement policies like Civic Excellence Recognitions. Notably, in 2020-2021, [Massachusetts established a \\$1.5 million Civic Trust Fund](#) to

fund some of the categories addressed in H 5981 and has increased their commitment to the trust fund over the past few years to \$2.5 million.

The historical underfunding of civic education has directly contributed to our country's growing lack of civic knowledge today. This was observed in our students recently through [the first dip in NAEP civic scores in over two decades](#). Moreover, the lack of resources and access is felt even more intensely by underserved communities such as low-income and rural communities, and mainly by Black and Brown students. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and RI Civic Learning Coalition study [reported that non-white students and those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds expressed much less confidence in their civic knowledge and their civic dispositions than their white and high-socioeconomic background peers](#).

A slew of data underscores the same underlying point: young people's faith in democracy is faltering at an alarming rate, and we must heed the call to action. A report by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and Protect Democracy published in April 2025, demonstrated that [only 36% of Gen Z believe our democracy as it is today is sufficient to address the issues facing the countries today while only 16% agree that democracy is working well for young people](#). The Institute for Citizens and Scholars' Civic Outlook of Young Adults in America found that [57% of 18-24 year olds are dissatisfied with our political system, while over half expressed little to no trust in government institutions](#). The only way to combat this is to equip our youth with the tools needed to assert their agency and understand their stake in ensuring that our democracy functions and evolves as necessary.

Now more than ever, in a time of much uncertainty and a faltering faith in our democracy among our young people, it is essential to invest in our teachers and students to ensure they are prepared with the tools and skills required to teach and participate in a 21st-century democracy. This committee has an opportunity to ensure that RI leads the country in delivering a high-quality civic learning experience for our future leaders by committing to ensuring that all students, not just those who can afford it, have access to a civic education that engages them beyond the rote memorization of historical facts and towards the applied action and repetition of civic skills that are necessary for continued civic engagement. As they do in science courses when they take science labs, our young people need hands-on, experiential civics to truly engage in their learning meaningfully.

Thank you for your time and for giving me the opportunity to write in favor of Bill H5981. I urge you to move this bill to a vote.

Sincerely,

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