

Dear Chairman Abney and Finance Committee Members,

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

I support this legislation because I believe that language is an essential part of every person's education and as a student of languages myself, would love to continue to see the impact that language education will bring to the youth, college student's careers, and beyond. In my own endeavors, I have been able to use my knowledge of Spanish, French, and Chinese to meet and form deep connections with people, perform better than my coworkers at jobs, and help those in need who struggle with speaking English.

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,

Henry P. Velez, President of Latin American Student Organization at Rhode Island College.