

Dear Chairman Abney and Finance Committee Members,

My name is Neleh Kay, and I am writing in strong support of House Bills No. 5744 and 5982. I am an English and Education Policy student at Brown University and care deeply about these bills.

I support this legislation because bilingualism is a national resource that should be encouraged, preserved, and celebrated at every opportunity. I support this legislation because I've heard directly from Providence Public School District students about the grief of losing the ability to speak their home language and the struggle of isolation often accompanying ESL programs led by monolingual teachers unfamiliar with their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Finally, I support this legislation because so do the decades of research that demonstrate bilingually instructed students experience long-term benefits like higher rates of academic performance and cognitive skills like executive function when compared to their monolingual counterparts.

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,
Neleh Kay