

**ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT**

**TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5982,  
AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION – SUPPORT  
AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION  
May 15, 2025**

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this legislation which would create a dual language program fund administered by the Rhode Island Department of Education for districts to start, expand, and improve dual language programs for all grades from pre-kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Over 40% of students in Rhode Island’s urban districts speak a language other than English at home.<sup>1</sup> Dual language programs allow a student to keep speaking their native language at school while they learn English. This differs from the English as a Second Language (ESL) model, where students are immersed in an English-speaking classroom, and pulled out by ESL teachers to work either one-on-one or in a small group on English. This fund would assist school districts in implementing or improving dual language programs so that students are encouraged to speak their ancestral languages while also learning English.

Multilingual learners (MLLs) often face systemic barriers outside of the classroom. MLL students are more likely to be lower-income, attend high-poverty schools, and lack access to services that improve English proficiency.<sup>2</sup> Students facing these complicated issues should not have to additionally worry about understanding course materials in a language they are still learning.

Thank you for considering our views.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/multilingual-learners\\_fb2024.pdf](https://rikidscount.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/multilingual-learners_fb2024.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/DLL-FactSheet-US-FINAL.pdf>