



**RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS** AFT
AFL - CIO

To: House Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: April 9, 2026
Re: Sales Tax Exemption for School Supplies
Testimony in Support of H 7596 (Hopkins, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of H 7596, legislation that provides temporary sales tax relief on school supplies to help Rhode Island families manage rising back-to-school costs.

RIFTHP appreciates the Committee's attention to the real financial strain facing working families. Across Rhode Island, educators are seeing firsthand how affordability challenges are impacting students' ability to come to school prepared with basic materials. In the current economic climate, even modest relief can make a meaningful difference for families trying to balance housing, food, and school-related expenses.

H 7596 takes an important step by recognizing school supplies as essential items and offering targeted tax relief during a critical time of year. However, the bill's impact is limited by its narrow one-week window and item restrictions. Many families—particularly those working multiple jobs or facing transportation barriers—may not be able to take advantage of such a short timeframe.

To strengthen this proposal, RIFTHP respectfully recommends expanding the exemption period to allow greater access, increasing or removing the per-item cost cap for essential items like backpacks, and ensuring consistent participation across retailers. These changes would make the policy more equitable and more effective in reaching the students who need support the most.

Educators across our state routinely step in to fill gaps when students lack supplies. Policies like this are a step toward relieving that burden, but they should be structured to maximize access and impact.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support H 7596 and consider amendments to expand its reach and effectiveness.

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