

Testimony on House Bill 7391
An Act Relating To Education – Teachers' Retirement

April 16, 2026

Chairperson Abney and members of the House Committee on Finance:

My name is Myles J. Brawn-Husband. I am a Warwick resident, a Peer Support Specialist, and a dedicated advocate for the rights and well-being of our community members. I am writing today to urge your strong support for House Bill 7391, which seeks to reinstate the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for our retired teachers, state employees, and municipal workers.

This issue is deeply personal to me. My mother is an educator, and through her, I have seen firsthand the dedication and tireless effort that Rhode Island's teachers pour into our future generations. Teachers like my mother do not just provide a service; they are the backbone of our community. When we promise our educators a secure retirement, we are making a pact that should be honored. Suspending COLA breaks that promise and creates unnecessary hardship for those who have spent their lives serving others.

As an advocate, I focus heavily on the stability of our local infrastructure and the dignity of those who keep our state running. Our retired public servants are a vital part of that infrastructure. The suspension of COLA has placed an undue burden on these retirees, particularly as the cost of basic necessities—housing, healthcare, and groceries—has risen significantly. For many, including those in the disability community who rely on fixed incomes, the lack of an adjustment isn't just a financial inconvenience; it is a threat to their independence and quality of life.

Reinstating COLA is a matter of:

- **Economic Stability:** When our retirees have predictable stable incomes, they can continue participating in our local economy, supporting the very "taxable infrastructure" that funds our state services.
- **Keeping Our Promises:** Restoring these adjustments is about maintaining the integrity of the state's commitment to those who have already fulfilled their commitment to us, including our dedicated educators.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** Prospective state employees and teachers look at how we treat our retirees. Supporting House Bill 7391 sends a message that Rhode Island values public service and honors the long-term well-being of its workforce.

We cannot advocate for a "vibrant" Rhode Island while leaving behind the people who built it. Reinstating COLA ensures that those who served our state — including my mother and her colleagues — are not forced into financial instability by inflation.

I respectfully ask this Committee to recommend House Bill 7391 for passage to restore fairness and security to our retirement system. Thank you for your time and for your dedication to the hardworking people of Rhode Island.

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