



April 28, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney, Chairman

Rhode Island House Finance Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Opposition to H7163 – Limiting Rhode Island Participation in Federal SGO Program

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Independent Schools Association of Rhode Island, we respectfully submit this letter in opposition to H7163, which would restrict Rhode Island's ability to participate in the federal Scholarship Granting Organization (SGO) tax credit program established under the Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA).

H7163 would prohibit Rhode Island from opting into this federal program unless the General Assembly separately authorizes such participation, effectively creating a new statutory barrier to participation in a federally funded opportunity for Rhode Island students.

H7163 Limits Access to Federal Resources for Rhode Island Students

The ECCA program represents a federally funded, privately supported initiative that:

- Requires no state appropriation
- Does not reduce state education funding
- Does not impact municipal education budgets

Instead, it allows Rhode Island to leverage federal tax credits and private philanthropy to support students directly.

H7163 would unnecessarily delay or prevent Rhode Island families from accessing these resources, while families in other states move forward.

ECCA Provides Direct Benefits to Public School Students

While often characterized as a private school program, ECCA is broader in scope and provides meaningful, direct benefits to students enrolled in public schools.

Under ECCA, scholarships may be used by eligible families to cover:

- Tutoring and academic intervention services
- Standardized testing and college readiness (SAT, ACT, AP)
- Dual enrollment and career pathway coursework
- Curriculum materials and online learning tools
- Educational therapies and special education supports
- Transportation tied to academic programming

These are real, out-of-pocket costs that many Rhode Island public school families struggle to afford.

By enabling SGOs to support these expenses, Rhode Island can:

- Reduce inequities in access to academic supports
- Strengthen college and career readiness

This Is a Supplement to Public Education — Not a Substitute

ECCA does not divert funding from public schools. In fact:

- Funds flow from federal tax credits and private donations, not state budgets
- Scholarships support students and families, not institutions
- Public school students are fully eligible beneficiaries

Opting into ECCA allows Rhode Island to bring additional resources into the public education ecosystem, particularly for students who need supplemental academic support beyond what schools can provide.

H7163 Creates Unnecessary Delay and Uncertainty

The federal program has a defined implementation timeline, and states must act in a timely manner to ensure participation.

By requiring additional legislative approval before the state can opt in, H7163:

- Introduces delay that could cause Rhode Island to miss early participation opportunities
- Creates uncertainty for nonprofit organizations preparing to serve students
- Risks leaving Rhode Island families behind while other states access available federal support

A Missed Opportunity for Equity

Rhode Island has made strong commitments to:

- Closing achievement gaps
- Supporting working families
- Expanding access to postsecondary opportunities

ECCA aligns with these goals by helping families afford the supplemental services that drive student success.

Blocking or delaying participation would disproportionately impact:

- Low- and middle-income families
- Students who need tutoring or specialized supports
- Students pursuing college and career pathways

Conclusion

H7163 would place Rhode Island at a disadvantage by restricting access to a federal program that provides new resources for students without impacting state education funding.

We respectfully urge the Committee to oppose H7163 and preserve Rhode Island's ability to act efficiently and effectively to support all students—including those in our public schools.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure that any implementation of ECCA in Rhode Island reflects the state's values, supports public education, and delivers meaningful benefits to families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Brian Cordeiro
President
Independent Schools Association of Rhode Island