



April 28, 2026

**The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair**  
**House Finance Committee**  
**Rhode Island Statehouse**  
**Providence, RI 02903**

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H7245 — EDUCATION EQUITY AND PROPERTY  
TAX RELIEF ACT**

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for House Bill H7245, which would strengthen state support for extraordinary special education costs by lowering the reimbursement threshold in fiscal years 2028 and 2029 and by providing funding in the following fiscal year for approved excess costs associated with special education students who move into a district after the district has approved its fiscal year budget. This is a practical and important step toward ensuring school districts can better respond to high-cost student needs without destabilizing local budgets.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public systems deliver measurable value. This includes centering **ALICE households** — families who are working and still priced out of stability by the high cost of basics. As we have noted in prior testimony, **39% of Rhode Island households are below the ALICE Threshold**, meaning many working families have little financial margin to absorb instability in essential public systems, including education. For these families, strong and adequately supported special education services are critical to child development, learning, and long-term family stability.

The evidence is clear that sustained and equitable education funding improves student outcomes, especially for low-income students. Research by Jackson, Johnson, and Persico found that increased school spending led to more educational attainment, higher adult wages, and lower adult poverty, with especially strong gains for children from low-income families. Additional research on special education found that reducing access to services led to lower high school completion and college enrollment, underscoring the importance of stable supports for students with disabilities.

That evidence is especially relevant here. H7245 recognizes that extraordinary special education costs and unanticipated midyear enrollment changes can place significant pressure on school districts. Strengthening reimbursement for these costs helps ensure students receive the



services they need while allowing districts to plan more responsibly and sustain educational quality. This bill is a practical, equity-focused investment in student success and stability.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill H7245. Improving Rhode Island's approach to extraordinary special education costs is a meaningful step toward ensuring students with disabilities have access to the supports they need to learn, develop, and thrive.

Sincerely,

**Elijah McLean**  
**Manager, Government Relations & Policy**  
**United Way of Rhode Island**