



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 H7454 — 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 H7454, which would strengthen Rhode Island's foundation education aid formula by including **Medicaid enrollment** in the student success factor beginning with the FY 2027 calculation. This is a practical step to better identify high-need students and ensure education funding more accurately reflects the level of need in school communities across Rhode Island.

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. In Rhode Island, **39% of households are below the ALICE Threshold**, meaning many working families have limited financial margin and may still struggle to meet basic needs even when they do not show up through traditional measures alone.

H7454 responds to that reality by improving how Rhode Island identifies students from low-income households for purposes of school funding. Nationally, many states now rely in full or in part on direct certification through public benefit programs such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid to better capture student needs. The Learning Policy Institute notes that direct certification helps states identify students from low-income backgrounds even when household income forms are not completed, and USDA approved Rhode Island to participate in the **Direct Certification with Medicaid Demonstration Project** for school year 2024–25, increasing access for low-income children while reducing administrative burden for schools and families.

For students, families, and communities, more accurate identification means a stronger chance that state resources will follow actual needs. United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill H7454. This bill is a practical and equity-focused improvement that will help ensure Rhode Island's education funding formula better reflects the realities facing students and working families.

Sincerely,



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