



Testimony in Support
The Education Equity And Property Tax Relief Act
April 28, 2026

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H7455. At a time when schools are navigating increased student needs, this bill takes a direct and practical approach by investing in the staff and systems required to support students' mental and behavioral health in real time.

H7455 establishes dedicated funding, equal to 2% of district expenditures, to expand access to school-based mental and behavioral health services, including school social workers, counselors, psychologists, and behavioral support staff. This is not a new concept, but rather a necessary step to bring Rhode Island closer to nationally recommended staffing levels.

What makes this proposal particularly strong is its focus on capacity. Many districts are currently operating below recommended ratios, meaning students do not consistently receive the support they need to stay engaged and succeed in the classroom. When those supports are not in place, educators are left to manage complex needs without adequate resources, often leading to disruptions that impact entire school communities.

This bill shifts that dynamic. By investing in trained professionals and requiring districts to expand not supplant services, it ensures that funding translates into additional, visible support for students. The inclusion of eligibility criteria tied to staffing gaps and oversight from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education further strengthens implementation and accountability.

From a budget perspective, this approach prioritizes stability. Schools that are equipped to respond early to student needs are better positioned to reduce chronic absenteeism, limit escalated behavioral incidents, and avoid more intensive interventions that carry higher long-term costs.

This is also an equity issue. Students from low-income communities, including many Latino students and multilingual learners, are less likely to have access to mental health services outside of school. Strengthening school-based supports helps ensure that all students regardless of background have access to the conditions necessary for learning.

H7455 recognizes that academic success is closely tied to student well-being and provides a clear, structured path to strengthen both. For these reasons, LPI respectfully urges the Committee to support H7455. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
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