



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 H7456 — 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 H7456, which would require all public schools in grades K-12 to maintain at least **one full-time certified school social worker for every 250 students** and would appropriate an additional **\$2 million in FY 2026** to help districts and municipalities employ additional social workers.

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 families have limited financial margin to absorb instability at home, at work, or in school. For those households, access to school-based social and emotional supports can be essential to student wellbeing and academic success.

This bill reflects established best practice. The National Association of Social Workers recommends a ratio of **1 school social worker for every 250 students**, noting that lower ratios may be needed for students with intensive needs. NASW also emphasizes that school social workers provide direct and indirect mental health services, help remove barriers to learning, support school safety, and connect students and families to needed services.

That evidence is especially relevant now. Ensuring adequate school social work capacity is a practical investment in prevention, student support, and school stability. H7456 would help schools respond earlier to behavioral health needs, strengthen family engagement, and better support students whose learning is disrupted by trauma, housing instability, or other stressors.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill H7456. This bill is a strong and timely step toward ensuring Rhode Island students have access to the in-school supports they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

Sincerely,



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