



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
AFL - CIO

To: House Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: April 28, 2026
Re: School Social Worker Staffing Requirements
Testimony in Support of **H 7456** (Shallcross Smith, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of H 7456, legislation that protects students by establishing minimum school social worker staffing levels and providing resources to support implementation.

Students across Rhode Island are experiencing increased mental health and behavioral challenges that require consistent access to trained professionals. Many schools currently lack sufficient social work staff, leaving educators without the support needed to address complex student needs and leaving students without timely access to services. This gap directly impacts classroom learning, school climate, and student well-being.

H 7456 establishes a clear, research-based staffing standard of one school social worker per 250 students and provides additional state funding to help districts meet that requirement. By setting a statewide expectation and pairing it with dedicated funding, the bill ensures that all students—regardless of district—have access to essential mental health supports.

From the perspective of educators and school staff, school social workers play a critical role in supporting students, de-escalating crises, connecting families to services, and helping maintain stable learning environments. Ensuring adequate staffing levels strengthens both student outcomes and working conditions for educators.

This proposal represents a practical step toward addressing longstanding gaps in student mental health services while creating more consistent and equitable support across Rhode Island schools.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support H 7456.

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