

Representative Marvin L. Abney  
House Finance Committee  
State House  
Providence, RI

April 28, 2026

### Testimony in Support of H7456 Relating to Education - School Social Worker Ratio

Dear Chair Abney and Honorable House Finance Committee Members:

The National Association of Social Workers, RI Chapter (NASW-RI) is in strong support of H7456 Relating to Education - School Social Worker Ratio filed by Representative Shallcross Smith. We are championing this bill because it will improve the lives of children and families throughout the state. Specifically, H7456 will: 1) increase access to social workers in schools, 2) create more opportunities for health and wellness for students and their families through increased access to professionals who are trained to help and support them, and 3) decrease the rate of children diagnosed with mental health illnesses<sup>1</sup>.

Access to school social work is critical to the success of students in schools and beyond. School social workers play a vital role in fostering a safe, supportive, and nurturing educational environment for the students they serve, while also addressing the challenges students may face. A National Association of Social Workers national task force determined at a minimum, there should be one school social worker for every 250 students, per district, in order to adequately meet the needs of students in schools.

Currently 1 in 5 children in the United States experience a mental illness, which can include anxiety, depression, and behavioral health problems. Many students also experience serious life challenges like abuse or neglect, which can lead to long term negative outcomes on their mental and physical health. School social workers can help mitigate adverse effects through early intervention and prevention, connection to vital community and support services, and crisis intervention at school. This, in turn, will improve the academic performance of students and change their lives for the better.

We urge you to pass H7456 and increase access to the vital services school social workers provide. If you have any questions or would like to follow up further, we would be glad to connect with you.

Sincerely,



Rebekah Gewirtz  
Executive Director  
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<sup>1</sup> NASW IL Policy Proposal for Enhancing School Social Work Staffing Ratios, 2024, p. 4