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House Finance Committee – HB 7501 (BOOST: Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time)

April 27, 2026

My name is Latoya Watts, and I am the Founder and Executive Director of WattsNatural Tutoring, a Providence-based nonprofit dedicated to making literacy accessible to all learners. I am writing in strong support of HB 7501, the BOOST (Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time) bill, which would expand critical funding for out-of-school time programs across Rhode Island.

This past April break, our organization provided a week-long literacy and enrichment camp that demonstrates exactly what out-of-school time programs make possible. Our students—many of whom are striving readers and come from historically underserved communities—engaged in transformative, hands-on learning experiences. They visited Textron, where they were exposed to real-world applications of engineering and aviation. At North Central Airport, students not only toured the facilities but had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fly in small planes, explore aircraft controls, and see their neighborhoods, Rhode Island, and even nearby states from above. They also visited a local news station, where they learned how literacy, communication, and storytelling are essential in media and journalism careers.

These experiences are not just “field trips”—they are powerful learning moments that build vocabulary, background knowledge, confidence, and a sense of possibility. For many of our students, these were first-time experiences that expanded their understanding of what their futures could hold. Without out-of-school time programming, these opportunities simply would not exist.

Despite the clear impact, programs like ours operate with limited and inconsistent funding. To sustain and expand these opportunities, Rhode Island must invest in out-of-school time programming as an essential component of education—not an add-on. HB 7501 would provide the funding needed to ensure that more students, especially those from low-to-moderate income communities, have access to high-quality, enriching, and academically supportive programs year-round. This includes literacy instruction aligned to the Science of Reading, career exposure opportunities, and safe, structured environments during critical out-of-school hours.

I urge the committee to support HB 7501 and invest in the future of Rhode Island's children. Out-of-school time programs are not optional—they are essential to closing opportunity gaps, supporting working families, and preparing students for college, careers, and life.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony and for your commitment to supporting Rhode Island's youth.



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