

April 28, 2026

Re: SUPPORT for H7581 – Equity and Accountability in Civics

House Finance Committee – Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Dennis Haggerty, and I live in South Kingstown. I am writing to advocate for the passage of **H7581**. Rhode Island needs a dedicated \$1 million categorical fund for civic education. By prioritizing student population size, socioeconomic status, and various dimensions of need, RIDE can ensure equitable distribution of funding and that students of all backgrounds, not just those in districts that have the most resources, can afford high-quality civics.

By moving beyond rote memorization to applied, experiential learning, this funding equips our students with durable, real-world college and career skills – such as consensus-building, collaborative problem-solving, media literacy, and public speaking – fostering the leadership and resilience necessary to navigate a complex workforce and a diverse, rapidly developing society.

The statistics on civic knowledge and engagement shows that further investment is needed. Tufts' CIRCLE Report from 2022 uncovered significant racial and socioeconomic disparities in civics knowledge. While 64 percent of high-socioeconomic status (SES) white students expressed confidence in explaining key civics concepts, roughly one-third of non-white and low-SES students reported the same.

According to the 2022 Civic Health Index, Rhode Island ranked eleventh nationally for voting in local elections, eighth for attending public meetings, and fourteenth for contacting public officials. The MIT Election Performance Index revealed that while 86 percent of Rhode Islanders were registered to vote, turnout remained worse than the national average at around 44 percent. These statistics highlight a pressing need to fund civics education as a means of sustaining democratic engagement.

I also want to highlight the importance of the Civic Readiness Task Force. This bill ensures a continuous feedback loop where parents, students, and community advocates have a formalized role in advising the state. This is not just about writing a check; it is about building an annual cycle of accountability and community-led improvement. We should ensure that every child in Rhode Island has the opportunity to become a lifelong, engaged citizen.

Sincerely,

Dennis A. Haggerty
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Kingston, RI 02881