



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 H7581 — 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 H7581, which would establish a dedicated categorical fund for civics education in every district. Beginning with the fiscal year starting July 1, 2027, the bill would provide \$1 million in funding, including \$600,000 for teacher professional development, student-led civics projects, and related civic education uses, with the remaining funds supporting oversight and implementation by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Beginning the following fiscal year, the bill would increase that funding by at least 50% and direct those additional resources toward curriculum, media literacy, project-based learning, community partnerships, technical assistance, and evaluation.

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 margin to absorb instability and rely on strong public systems to help their children thrive. High-quality civics education helps students build knowledge, confidence, voice, and the skills needed to participate fully in school, community, and civic life.

CIRCLE at Tufts University finds that major inequities in youth voting persist and are often the result of unequal access to information and opportunities to participate; it also notes that many young people are not taught the practicalities of registering and voting in school. At the same time, evidence from a U.S. Department of Education-supported civic education initiative found that students taught by trained civics educators posted substantially higher civic knowledge gains and reported feeling more prepared to become involved in their communities. Locally, United Way's recent UnitedWeVote initiative found that while voter registration increased between 2020 and 2024, localized gaps remain and targeted civic engagement efforts should be continued and strengthened.



United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill H7581. This bill is a practical and forward-looking investment in civic learning, student voice, and a stronger democracy for Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

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