

Subject: SUPPORT for S2233 / H7581 – Closing the Civic Readiness Gap

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April 15, 2026

Dear Representative Abney (Chair) and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Gigi DiBello, and I currently work for a large public school district coordinating generative partnerships and collaborations that deepen student learning and efficacy. Earlier in my career, I served as Head of School at Sophia Academy, where I taught the Sister Mary Rielly Justice and Gender 8th Grade Seminar for over a decade. The curriculum was designed to provide a civics framework, with tools to draw from as students explored issues of interest that impacted their lives in multiple ways. From safe and affordable housing to public transportation to Ethnic Studies, our students met with their city, state, and federal legislators in Providence and D.C. to share their experiences and advocate for their rights.

Today, I am writing in support of **S2233 and H7581**.

As an educator, building administrator, and district leader, I've seen firsthand how the 2021 mandate is a grand and critical undertaking that, now more than ever, requires a sustainable funding stream. Currently, over 50% of Rhode Island teachers lack access to specialised civics professional development. This bill changes that by allocating \$600,000 for educator stipends and substitute coverage around professional development and curriculum implementation.

After leaving Sophia Academy in 2018, I assumed a new role as a district leader for Providence Public Schools. As the Supervisor of Social Studies and Culturally Responsive Teaching, one of my personal goals was to inspire social studies teacher leaders to more fully engage their students by embedding community experiential learning opportunities into their curriculum, as we had done so successfully at Sophia Academy. Institutional barriers (i.e., limited time, funding for training, and access to standards-aligned civics curriculum) stood in the way. Thousands of students could have benefited from a rich, transformative, hands-on, culturally responsive civics education if those barriers were removed.

What makes this legislation particularly strong is its sustainability. The fund provides consistent funding year-over-year, allowing districts and department leads to plan curricula with confidence, knowing they'll be properly supported. Further, the \$400,000 set aside for RIDE ensures there is actual oversight and accountability to track our progress and identify which districts still need help. We cannot ask teachers to fulfill this mandate without the professional support they deserve. I urge a favorable vote.

Best regards,

Gigi M. DiBello