

Subject: SUPPORT for H7581 – Funding and Accountability for Civics Education in RI

April 27, 2026

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Nina Rossomando. I am a retired clinical psychologist and a past president of the League of Women Voters of Rhode Island living in Westerly, RI. I am writing to strongly advocate for the passage of **H7581**.

In 2021 the Rhode Island legislators passed the *Civics Literacy Act* which requires civics education for graduation from all Rhode Island schools. This legislation was the first step to adequately prepare students in civics. The requirement for a hands-on civics project included in the legislation recognized that meaningful civic preparation needs to go beyond teaching history and structural knowledge of governmental institutions. It requires that students also acquire a range of important civic and cognitive skills and experiences.

As legislators you know that along with the freedoms guaranteed by our Bill of Rights and Constitution there are responsibilities of citizenship. I believe our schools have an essential role to educate young people for their civic responsibilities in our democracy. But our schools are failing.

The depth of the problem is obvious from the civics' scores on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2024) which showed a further decline in student performance compared to previous years, indicating a dramatic need for improved civic education. Many students reported limited opportunities to engage with civics both in and out of school, and in addition, score differences between demographic groups highlight the ongoing inequalities in civic education.

Preparing all students to be knowledgeable and active civic participants in the 21st century is more complicated and challenging than it was in the 19th or 20th centuries. In Rhode Island the biggest challenges are the lack of enough teachers trained to teach civics and the lack of dedicated funding. Currently, over 50% of Rhode Island teachers lack access to specialized civics professional development and there is no dedicated funding for training or new curricular materials.

H7581 establishes a categorical fund of \$1 million for teacher training and new curricula materials. Specifically, the bill allocates \$600,000 for educator stipends and substitute coverage around professional development and curriculum implementation. RIDE can distribute the funds equitably in a manner to reach students of all backgrounds. This legislation is modeled after highly successful Massachusetts legislation where students regularly score at the top of US states.

I'd like to share the urgency I feel by quoting Ben Sasse, former Republican Senator from Nebraska (Wall Street Journal, interview with T. Varadarajan, March 13, 2026) in which Sasse said: "In a republic, you're always only one generation away from the extinction of freedom... You don't pass along America in the bloodstream. You have to actually teach it. And we truly haven't been doing it since the '60s."

I urge you to pass H7581 to put Rhode Island in the forefront of states preparing our students to be knowledgeable and involved civic participants in our democracy.

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