

**Goal:** Emphasize the need for professional development and the "rollover" nature of the funds.

**Subject:** SUPPORT for H7581 – Closing the Civic Readiness Gap

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Providence, RI

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Dear Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Tatyana Kennedy, and I am a graduate student in the Urban Education Policy program at Brown University. I previously taught social studies across grades 5 through high school in Providence, Rhode Island. I am writing to strongly support S2233 and H7581.

As both a former classroom teacher and someone who now supports civics education implementation across schools, I have seen firsthand that the 2021 civic readiness mandate is both a critical step forward, and one that requires sustained investment to be successful. This work cannot rest on policy alone. It depends on whether educators have the time, training, and support to implement meaningful civic learning experiences.

In my time teaching, I often worked to design lessons that moved beyond traditional instruction and into authentic civic engagement. For example, I planned a unit with my fifth grade students focused on understanding the democratic process and how individuals can advocate for change within their own communities. The goal was to help students see that civic engagement is not something reserved for adulthood, but something they can actively participate in now. Students identified issues within their school, developed proposals, and practiced using their voices to advocate for change. They were deeply engaged and began to see themselves as contributors to their community.

However, without structured curriculum resources, dedicated planning time, or professional development in facilitating this kind of work, I was limited in how far I could take the experience. While students were able to develop strong ideas and practice advocacy within the classroom, I was not able to fully support them in engaging with external stakeholders or bringing their proposals beyond the school setting. The experience showed what is possible when students are given the opportunity to engage civically, but it also highlighted the gaps in support that prevent this work from reaching its full potential. I often think about how many more students could have experienced meaningful, real-world civic action if those barriers were removed, and are they continuing this engagement after they have moved on from my classroom.

The allocation of \$600,000 for educator stipends and substitute coverage directly addresses one of the most significant barriers: time. High-quality professional development requires space for teachers to learn, plan, and collaborate. It cannot simply be added on to an already demanding workload. The rollover nature of the funding is also critical, as it allows districts to build and sustain strong civics programs over time rather than relying on short-term solutions.

Additionally, the \$400,000 designated for the Rhode Island Department of Education ensures there is oversight and accountability. If we are serious about closing the civic readiness gap, we must track progress and ensure that all districts, especially those serving historically underserved communities, are supported in implementing this work effectively.

We cannot expect educators to meet the demands of this mandate without the professional support they deserve. This legislation recognizes that reality and provides a thoughtful, sustainable approach to strengthening civic education across Rhode Island.

I urge a favorable vote on S2233 and H7581.

Best regards,  
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