



April 8, 2026

Hon. Marvin Abney
Chair
House Finance Committee
HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: **Support of House Bill 8351 – An Act Relating to Education – The Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act**

Dear Chair Abney,

BuildRI is a domestic non-profit trade association comprised of four (4) contractor associations (the Labor Relations Division of the RI Chapter of the Associated General Contractors, the New England Mechanical Contractors' Ass'n, the RI Mason Contractors' Ass'n, and the RI and Southeast MA Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors' Ass'n), and seventeen (17) Local Trade Unions comprised of approximately 10,000 local tradesmen and women. On behalf of BuildRI, and our partners, we are in support for House Bill 8351.

For decades, our education system has emphasized a singular pathway: high school to college. In doing so, we have unintentionally created a stigma that careers in the skilled trades are "less than," despite the reality that these professions provide family-sustaining wages, healthcare, retirement security, and long-term economic prosperity. Today, union journey workers in Rhode Island routinely earn six-figure incomes in addition to comprehensive benefits. Yet, the unionized construction industry continues to face a critical shortage of skilled labor.

The Building Trades stand ready to serve as active partners in expanding construction-based Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities across our public schools. We strongly urge the General Assembly to ensure that any investment in these programs is impactful, measurable, and aligned with proven outcomes.

One important step forward is to regionalize how the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and local districts establish construction CTE pathways. CTE pathways are expensive to establish and maintain. Regionalizing CTE pathways throughout the five busing districts will allow the state and the districts to offset these high costs. BuildRI respectfully requests this legislation includes a reasonable strategy of incorporating and funding a regionalized approach to ensuring CTE pathways are accessible for all students.

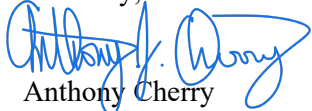
Currently, the lack of strategic coordination in developing these pathways has placed unnecessary strain on our public education system. RIDE has established 25 construction CTE pathways for students to explore and participate in; however, there appears to be little coordination regarding how and where these programs are implemented. As a result, districts are often competing with one another to recruit students and secure per-pupil funding, creating unnecessary competition rather than collaboration.

This fragmented approach also affects the involvement of trade unions, which are frequently asked to support classroom instruction. The current system limits the ability of Building Trades training instructors to be effectively utilized as specialized educators across programs.

We appreciate the time and effort RIDE has already dedicated to addressing this issue. The Rhode Island Building Trades have been actively collaborating with representatives from the Rhode Island Department of Education, business organizations, and labor unions to explore more strategic ways to promote and expand construction CTE pathways. The proposed study commission would further support our shared goal of creating a more robust, coordinated, and effective CTE system in Rhode Island.

We support the retooling and revamp the public education funding formula. Thank you for your attention to this correspondence. Please contact the undersigned if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Anthony Cherry
Assistant Executive Director