

Testimony in Support of H-8351 – The Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act
House Committee on Finance
April 28, 2026
Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies, Executive Director, Economic Progress Institute

The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Rep. McNamara’s H-8351, which would establish the Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act and revise the funding formula for public education in Rhode Island.

All children in Rhode Island deserve access to a quality education. Unfortunately, Rhode Island’s current school funding formula does not adequately or equitably support our students and communities. For example, according to RIPEC, RI has been underinvesting in our multilingual learners compared to most states with similar funding formulas, including our neighbors in MA and CT – this is despite the fact that one out of every eight students in RI is a multilingual learner.

For more than 25 years, the Economic Progress Institute has advocated for policies that increase equity and economic opportunity for low- and modest-income Rhode Islanders. As a part of that advocacy, I had the privilege of serving as a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission – a diverse group of education and community leaders convened by the Rhode Island Foundation and guided by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Over the course of more than a year, our Commission worked to develop a consensus set of recommendations for a fair, equitable, and adequate school funding system for Rhode Island. H-8351 reflects those recommendations.

Rep. McNamara’s H-8351 would:

1. Expand the funding formula to include the true costs of education, such as transportation, building maintenance, and early childhood screening, while shifting unpredictable, high-cost expenses to the state.
- 2. Increase funding for economically disadvantaged students, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in high-cost career and technical education programs.**
3. Require local contributions based on a community’s ability to pay, creating consistency and fairness.

4. Introduce accountability measures that tie spending to educational outcomes, including robust reporting and a tiered system of support for districts. H-8351 represents an opportunity to invest in children, equity, and the future success of our state and economy. The Economic Progress Institute urges passage.