

April 28, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HOUSE BILL 8351 - AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE RHODE ISLAND EDUCATION FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Chair Abney and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, we respectfully submit strong support for House Bill 8351. Rhode Island's school funding formula has not been fundamentally updated in 15 years. The League was an active participant in the Blue-Ribbon Commission process that helped inform this legislation, and we were honored to serve alongside our partners in this collaborative effort. We view this bill as a direct reflection of the Commission's consensus outcomes and shared work.

Through that process, the Commission, of which municipal leaders were an integral part, arrived at a shared framework centered on four core shifts in Rhode Island's education funding system:

- Accounting for the full cost of education and distributing those costs more equitably between the state and municipalities;
- Requiring local contributions based on a municipality's ability to pay, ensuring greater fairness across communities;
- Tailoring funding more directly to student needs, so resources follow instructional and support requirements; and
- Increasing fiscal responsibility, reporting, and strategic management to improve transparency and long-term sustainability.

These recommendations reflect an interconnected and consensus-driven approach that emerged directly from the Commission's work, and they form the foundation of the funding structure advanced in House Bill 8351 to more fairly and clearly distribute the essential costs of public education.

The League agrees with the bill's findings that a high-quality public education system is essential to Rhode Island's civic health and economic future, and that equitable, sufficient, and predictable education funding is both a legal and moral obligation of the state. We also recognize the need to address longstanding inequities in local fiscal capacity and outdated funding mechanisms that have contributed to uneven educational opportunities across municipalities.

House Bill 8351 reflects the Commission's vision by modernizing the state's education finance system through a transparent, student-centered funding formula, incorporating student-based weights that reflect instructional need, and aligning municipal contributions more closely with fiscal capacity. The League supports these efforts to create a more coherent and equitable structure for funding public education.

We also support the bill's emphasis on improved predictability, accountability, and transparency, including standardized reporting, clearer definitions of education costs, and stronger statewide visibility into how resources are allocated and used. These provisions align with the League's priority of ensuring municipalities have reliable fiscal expectations and the ability to plan responsibly.

At the same time, the League emphasizes the importance of continued collaboration during implementation to ensure the transition is practical, sustainable, and responsive to the operational realities of municipalities and school districts of all sizes.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns supports House Bill 8351 and looks forward to continuing our partnership with the General Assembly and all stakeholders to advance this shared vision.

Together, we have an opportunity to build a more equitable, transparent, and sustainable education funding system that strengthens Rhode Island's schools, supports our municipalities, and improves outcomes for all students.

Thank you for allowing us to share our perspective on this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Randy R. Rossi
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Finance Committee