

April 28, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chairman
House Committee on Finance
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: H8351 — Letter of Concern

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF), I am writing regarding H8351, the proposed Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act.

We would first like to commend the Rhode Island Foundation and the members of the Blue Ribbon Commission for their thoughtful and comprehensive work in examining the state's education funding system. Their report has provided an important framework for advancing a more equitable, transparent, and student-centered approach to funding public education in Rhode Island. We also appreciate your leadership in bringing forward legislation that reflects many of these recommendations.

RICCF strongly supports the bill's core objectives and its focus on better aligning resources with student needs. In particular, we recognize the bill's efforts to account for high-need populations and to provide state support for certain high-cost services. It is critical that Rhode Island continues to meet the goals of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) -which was formerly called P.L. 94-142 or the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975)- which requires public schools to make available to all eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their individual needs.

We respectfully raise a concern regarding the treatment of students in foster care and the need to also ensure alignment with federal requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), specifically Title I protections for children in foster care.

ESSA establishes important safeguards to promote educational stability and continuity for students in foster care, including:

- Ensuring that students can remain in their school of origin when it is in their best interest;
- Providing transportation to support school stability; and
- Requiring coordination between local education agencies and child welfare agencies to facilitate enrollment and continuity of services.

While H8351 appropriately recognizes certain costs associated with students in state custody such as out-of-district transportation, it does not explicitly identify students in foster care as a distinct population; nor

does it incorporate or reinforce the broader ESSA Title I protections related to school stability and interagency coordination.

Given the significant educational disruptions often experienced by children in foster care, we believe it is critical that Rhode Island's updated funding framework not only complies with federal law, but also clearly affirms and supports these protections within state statute.

Accordingly, RICCF respectfully recommends that H8351 be amended to:

- Explicitly recognize students in foster care as a defined student population within the statute;
- Align transportation provisions with ESSA's school stability requirements; and
- Encourage or require coordination between local education agencies and the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) consistent with federal law.

We believe these changes would strengthen an already strong bill and ensure that Rhode Island's most vulnerable students are fully supported both financially and programmatically.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for your continued commitment to improving outcomes for all Rhode Island students. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations further.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas Meyer
Executive Director