



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
AFL - CIO

To: House Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: April 30, 2026
Re: Adjunct Faculty Healthcare Access
Testimony in **Support of H 7158** (Hull, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of H 7158, legislation that addresses inequitable access to healthcare by extending state employee health benefits to adjunct faculty who carry substantial teaching loads.

RIFTHP would like to thank Representative Hull for his continued leadership in introducing this legislation and for his ongoing commitment to supporting adjunct faculty and ensuring fair treatment for these essential educators.

Under current state law, employees who work twenty hours or more per week are eligible for employer-sponsored healthcare benefits. However, adjunct faculty are excluded from this framework because their work is not measured in weekly hours, but instead by course load. This creates a structural inequity where adjunct faculty performing work comparable to at least half-time employment are denied access to the same benefits provided to other state workers.

H 7158 corrects this inequity by establishing a parallel and appropriate standard for adjunct faculty. Instead of using hours worked per week, the bill defines eligibility based on teaching load—extending benefits to adjunct faculty who teach at least fifty percent of a full-time course load. This aligns with the existing threshold used across state employment, where half-time workers qualify for healthcare coverage.

At Rhode Island College, where RIFTHP represents adjunct faculty, a full-time teaching load is typically twelve credit hours per semester. Adjunct faculty who teach half that load are performing substantial instructional work that extends far beyond time in the classroom. Faculty responsibilities include course preparation, grading, student advising, office hours, and ongoing professional development. Many adjuncts are long-term employees who have dedicated years, and in some cases decades, to teaching Rhode Island students.

Despite this, adjunct faculty are often treated as second-class employees within the public higher education system. While half-time workers elsewhere in state government have access to healthcare benefits, adjunct faculty with comparable workloads do not. This disparity undermines workforce stability, discourages retention, and sends the wrong message about how Rhode Island values its educators.

It is also important to note that not all adjunct faculty will enroll in state health plans if made available. Many have alternative coverage through other employment or retirement. As a result, the fiscal impact is more targeted than it may initially appear, while the benefit to workforce equity and stability is significant.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support H 7158.

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