



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR DANIEL J. McKEE

April 30, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House, Room 35
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H8164 – An Act Relating to Education - University of Rhode Island

Dear Chair Abney:

I write in support of H-8164, which would, in relevant part, amend the University of Rhode Island's (URI) governing statutes to enhance the flexibility of its Board of Trustees with respect to procurement and university management.

First, this legislation would remove the FTE cap on the University of Rhode Island, as reflected in my FY 2027 recommended budget, providing the flexibility necessary to align staffing capacity with research opportunities and institutional growth. Removal of the cap would ensure the University can fully leverage its recent academic and research gains while remaining obligated to operate within its approved budget when hiring staff and faculty.

The University has consistently operated at or near its FTE cap, requiring difficult staffing decisions, including hiring constraints, even as research activity and external funding have grown. These state-imposed limitations have made it more difficult for the University to fully capitalize on a 25% increase in research expenditures over five years, exceeding \$144 million.

At the same time, the University has expanded its research output and attracted significant philanthropic and federal support, including a \$1.6 million gift to expand access to engineering education for Rhode Island students, a \$7 million National Science Foundation (NSF) grant for microplastic research, and a \$5 million NSF grant to broaden participation in quantum information science. These investments represent only a portion of the \$137.5 million in total grants and contract revenue URI received in FY25, all of which support long-term research and innovation in Rhode Island.

These achievements are further reflected in URI's distinction as an R1 institution in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education and its recognition for two consecutive years as the best public university in New England by the Wall Street Journal. URI is now among the

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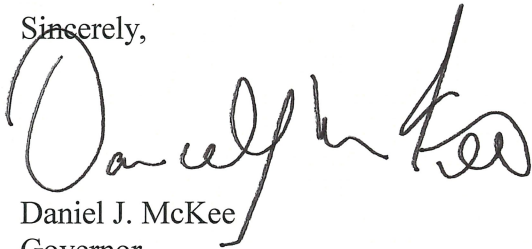
187 institutions nationwide to achieve R1 classification, placing it within the top 4.8% of degree-granting postsecondary institutions nationally.

Second, this legislation amends and expands URI's exemptions from the procurement processes within the State Purchases Act. These changes will enable the Board of Trustees to exercise greater authority over contracting and operational decisions and allow URI to respond more effectively and efficiently in a competitive higher education environment. These proposed changes would bring the University in line with peer flagship institutions across New England—including in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts—that are generally authorized to procure goods and services and enter contracts pursuant to policies adopted by their governing boards rather than being subject to full state purchasing statutes.

This Act, together with my recommended budget, supports the University of Rhode Island by enabling it to be more nimble and to make timely staffing and operational decisions in furtherance of its mission. URI operates with a diversified revenue model, generating the majority of its funding from tuition, grants, and other non-state sources. State appropriations represent a portion of the University's overall revenues—URI received \$112.74 million in state appropriations in FY25 while generating over \$500 million in operating revenue—underscoring the importance of maintaining operational flexibility to support its academic, research, and administrative functions. Flexibility in procurement and staffing is essential to a university operating at this level.

My administration remains committed to supporting a strong and balanced public higher education system that advances opportunity for all Rhode Islanders. Thank you for the opportunity to express my strong support for H-8164.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel J. McKee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Daniel J. McKee
Governor

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance
The Honorable Kathleen A. Fogarty
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House