



April 30, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney  
Chair, House Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

*Re: In support of H8336 (An Act Relating to Education -- Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Pilot Program Act)*

Dear Chair Abney and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Jennifer Boulay, and I serve as Director of the Hope Scholarship at Rhode Island College. In this role, I work directly with the students the Hope Scholarship is designed to serve. I submit this testimony in strong support of H8336, which would make the Hope Scholarship a permanent program at RIC.

The Hope Scholarship covers tuition for eligible students' junior and senior years at Rhode Island College. It is a completion-focused scholarship — designed not just to recruit students, but to ensure they finish. It targets high-need fields including health care, nursing, and the trades: the precise workforce gaps Rhode Island must address to sustain its communities and its economy.

As an educator, I have the privilege of seeing young people at their most vulnerable and their most determined. I see students who are the first in their families to pursue a college degree — brilliant and driven, and one unexpected bill away from walking away from everything they've worked for. And I have watched this scholarship reach those students and change the entire trajectory of their story.

When a student learns Rhode Island will cover their final two years, the weight lifts. The future, which may have felt distant or uncertain, suddenly feels possible. For many, it is the first time an institution has said: *we believe in you — and we're going to prove it*. That is exactly what hope feels like. And it changes everything about how a student engages with their education. They take harder courses. They pursue demanding majors. They show up — fully.

This is what good policy looks like: it meets people where they are, removes the barrier holding them back, and trusts them to do the rest. Our students are doing the rest — every single day. And the numbers bear that out.

Since 2023, the program has supported 864 students and saved them millions in tuition costs. The data shows:

- Enrollment is up among eligible students.
- Retention rates are up — students are staying and finishing.
- Eligibility has grown, reaching more Rhode Island families.
- Students are taking more classes and earning more credits per semester.
- Eligible students are graduating at higher rates than their peers.

These are not vanity metrics. They represent students who stayed enrolled when financial pressure might have forced them out, who took on the harder courses because they weren't consumed by financial fear, and who are now crossing the stage at graduation and entering Rhode Island's workforce.

This committee rightly evaluates policy through a fiscal lens. I would respectfully submit that the Hope Scholarship is not a cost — it is an investment with a measurable return.

Every Rhode Island student who completes a degree at RIC and enters a high-need field here — in a hospital, a classroom, a skilled trade — represents a return on this investment in the form of tax revenue, workforce stability, and reduced dependence on recruiting talent from out of state. The cost of training and retaining homegrown professionals is far lower than the long-term cost of workforce shortages in health care, education, and the trades.

Equally important is the cost of inaction. If H8336 does not pass and the program sunsets, students lose the certainty that draws them to RIC in the first place. Enrollment will soften. Retention gains will erode. Rhode Island will cede ground to out-of-state institutions that offer comparable or stronger financial incentives. The pilot's gains are real — but they are fragile so long as the program remains temporary. Permanence is what makes the promise of Hope credible.

I respectfully urge this committee to report H8336 out favorably. This is an opportunity to show families that in Rhode Island, hope is not just a motto. It is a guarantee.

Sincerely,



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