

April 28, 2026

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

Subject: Letter of Support, Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Pilot Program Act, House Bill 8336

Dear Chairman Abney:

I am writing to express my support for House Bill 8336 that Representative Joseph McNamara is sponsoring and would convert the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Pilot Program Act into a continuing scholarship program at Rhode Island College.

Last year, the national average college debt was over \$30,000 per student. In Rhode Island, obtaining a college education is an expensive investment but a powerful tool for economic mobility. Student success leads to building and sustaining a healthy state economy.

The Hope Scholarship makes college education in Rhode Island an affordable reality and incentivizes four-year degree completion. Data from Rhode Island College indicates that in FY26, there are 572 scholarship-eligible students, or 572 RIC juniors and seniors for whom this scholarship is making college more affordable. RIC's November 2025 report indicates that they anticipate 770 Hope Scholarship recipients in FY27, demonstrating the program's growth. The college reported in August 2025 that they saw a 9.6% increase of in-state applications for the fall 2025 semester and have the largest freshman class in 15 years. The college's administration attributes this to the Hope Scholarship and the increased return on investment of a RIC degree as a result.

Graduating college within four years is important because it not only saves money spent on tuition but is an economic indicator. Studies show that students who graduate within four years have higher post-college earnings over their lifetime compared with peers who did not graduate on time. The on-time completion component of the Hope Scholarship helps boost Rhode Islanders' life-long earnings, which ultimately helps the state's economy. It is important to remember that over 70% of students who graduated from RIC remain in the state after graduation. These graduates are Rhode Island's future teachers, nurses, social workers, cyber security analysts, and so much more.



80 Washington St., 2nd Floor  
Providence, RI 02903  
401-736-1100 | TDD: 401-734-9481  
[www.riopc.edu](http://www.riopc.edu)

Permanently codifying the Hope Scholarship will allow future cohorts of Rhode Island students to take advantage of this exciting program. The future of Rhode Island depends on the investments we make in our students. The Hope Scholarship provides our students with an affordable option for college and subsequent employment success. I thank the committee for its consideration of this bill and encourage the committee to support its passage.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Shannon W. Gilkey'.

Shannon W. Gilkey, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance  
The Honorable Joseph McNamara, bill sponsor  
Ms. Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House