

To whom it may concern,

My name is Caroline Lamarine, and I am writing in strong support of H7597.

Appropriating \$200,000 to the Rhode Island Black Business Association is a *necessary* investment in the people and small businesses that have kept Rhode Island running.

What stands out to me about RIBBA is not just the scale of its impact, but where this impact has extended to. The organization has reached thousands of small businesses across the state, helping generate tens of millions in economic activity and contributing to the creation of thousands of jobs.

But the truth is, RIBBA's impact goes beyond these numbers because RIBBA does not just support small businesses; it supports the entire state.

Almost two years ago, I found myself at a crossroads. I was preparing to graduate from college, but even after years of hard work, I had no clear sense of what came next or where I fit. The Rhode Island community had supported me in getting to that point, and I knew I wanted to give back; I just did not know where to start.

Then I came across a flyer for RIBBA's LEAP, or Leadership Equity Accelerated Pathway, mentorship and training program.

Through LEAP, I built confidence in myself as a leader, developed a stronger understanding of public service, and was provided the space to develop my passion for social policy. More importantly, I was surrounded by mentors who pushed me to think bigger than I ever had before.

These professionals, many of whom were executives and leaders, took time out of their already demanding schedules to mentor us completely free of charge. Why? Not because they had to, but because they wanted to.

That's how much Rhode Island leaders believe in RIBBA and its mission.

Because of that support, I did something I never thought I was capable of doing. I applied to graduate school at Brown University.

Before LEAP, I would not have even considered applying to an Ivy League program. After LEAP, I not only had the confidence to believe I belonged in those spaces, but I had the tools and support to take that step.

Today, I stand just weeks away from earning my Master of Public Affairs.

That is the impact of RIBBA. Programs like LEAP do not just prepare individuals for careers; they change how people see themselves and what they believe is possible. And because of

that, we show up as stronger leaders, more prepared to give back and contribute to the communities that have invested in us.

RIBBA shows up for people. And because of that, people show up for Rhode Island.

I respectfully urge you to support the passage of H7597. Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued commitment to the people of Rhode Island.

Best,

Caroline Lamarine