



May 12, 2026

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

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H7389 — THE SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION ACT**

Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for House Bill H7389, the Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act, which would establish a bilingual education support fund within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Beginning in FY2027, the bill would appropriate \$950,000 annually, including \$300,000 to support traditional public school district dual language programs, \$600,000 to expand teaching certifications for bilingual dual language and world language teachers, and up to \$50,000 for administrative and implementation support.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public systems deliver measurable value. This includes centering ALICE households — Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed — households. ALICE families work, yet find themselves priced out of stability by the high cost of living basics, including housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology. For ALICE families, strong public education systems are essential to ensuring children have access to opportunity and families can build long-term stability.

H7389 recognizes that multilingual learners need access to high-quality instruction, culturally responsive educators, and programs that support both English proficiency and native language development. This need is growing rapidly: according to the 2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, the number of multilingual learners in Rhode Island more than doubled between the 2014–2015 and 2024–2025 school years, increasing from 10,281 to 20,886 students. In the 2024–2025 school year, multilingual learners represented 16% of the state's public school student population.

At the same time, Rhode Island is facing serious educator workforce challenges, including a shortage of certified bilingual dual language and world language teachers. H7389 directly responds to this challenge by investing in educator certification and expanding the pipeline of teachers prepared to serve multilingual learners. The bill's findings note that despite eleven local education agencies having a high incidence of multilingual learners, only 8% of multilingual learners are enrolled in bilingual or dual language programs, due in part to the shortage of certified language educators and too few dual language programs across the state.



By supporting dual language program implementation and helping expand the pipeline of bilingual dual language and world language teachers, Rhode Island can better serve multilingual learners, strengthen school engagement, improve academic opportunity, and build a more multilingual and multicultural workforce. The bill also allows community-based organizations and institutions of higher education to partner with public school districts, recognizing that strong education systems require collaboration across schools, communities, and workforce partners.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests your support for House Bill H7389. Investing in bilingual education and educator certification is an investment in students, families, workforce development, and Rhode Island's long-term economic future.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean  
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United Way of Rhode Island