

7 May 2026

The Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee

Rhode Island State House

82 Smith Street

Providence, RI 02903

RE: SUPPORT FOR House Bill 7389 – THE SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION ACT

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

We write to express our strong support for **H 7389, "The Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act,"** introduced on February 13, 2026. This legislation represents a critical investment in Rhode Island's students and our state's future economic competitiveness by expanding access to high-quality **dual language bilingual programs** and addressing the urgent shortage of certified language educators. The University of Rhode Island strives to work in partnership with current and future bilingual dual language programs and their teachers.

The findings in this bill highlight a vital reality: Rhode Island's economic well-being depends on a **multilingual and multicultural workforce**. Proficiency in additional languages is a key driver of **global competitiveness**, yet currently, only **8% of multilingual learners** in our state are enrolled in bilingual or dual language programs. This gap exists despite the fact that 11 local education agencies (LEAs) have a high incidence of multilingual learners.

Supporting **H 7389** is an evidence-based decision. Decades of research confirm that high-quality dual language programs lead to:

- **Increased academic engagement and achievement.**
- A significant **drop in chronic absenteeism.**
- Positive **social-emotional development** and overall well-being.
- Faster development of **English proficiency** through native language instruction.

This act provides a clear roadmap to address these needs by establishing a **bilingual education support fund** with an annual appropriation of **\$950,000** starting in FY 2027. Specifically, it allocates 600,000 to expand teaching certifications** for bilingual dual language and world language teachers. This funding is essential to bridge the "demographic divide" between our growing multilingual student population and the insufficient number of certified educators available to serve them.

By providing grants to traditional public school districts, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education, this bill ensures that resources reach the areas with the highest need. It empowers LEAs to procure **high-quality curricular materials**, design professional development for instructors, and offer financial support for **teacher certification costs**.

Investing in our multilingual learners is an investment in **equity and excellence** for all Rhode Island students. We urge the committee to support the passage of **H 7389** to ensure our workforce is prepared for the international stage and our students have the tools they need to succeed in college and careers.

Sincerely,

Dr. Amy Correia
Associate Clinical Professor & Program Director of TESOL/BDL

Dr. Laura Hamman-Ortiz
Assistant Professor of TESOL/BDL

Dr. Nicole King
Assistant Professor of TESOL/BDL

Dr. Steve Przymus
Associate Professor of TESOL/BDL