

Chair Abney and members of the House Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Representative David Morales' legislation, the SABLE Act (H7389), and the continued investment in multilingual education opportunities for Rhode Island students and families.

My name is Sandra Cano. I previously had the honor of serving as a Rhode Island State Senator representing District 8 and as Chair of the Senate Education Committee from 2021 to 2024. Today, I speak to you not only as a former legislator and former sponsor and supporter of this work, but also as an immigrant, a mother, and someone who deeply understands the transformational power of language access and educational opportunity.

As an immigrant from Medellín, Colombia, I know firsthand the challenges many multilingual families face when navigating educational systems that are not always designed with them in mind. I also know the incredible strength, resilience, cultural richness, and economic value multilingual students bring to our schools and communities.

During my time in the Senate, I worked closely with Representative Morales, advocates, educators, students, and community organizations to advance policies that center educational equity and opportunity for multilingual learners. Together, we worked very hard to establish the RI Reconnect funding initiative because we understood that Rhode Island needed to make intentional investments in bilingual and multilingual education pathways and in the educators who make those programs possible.

The reality is that the current RI Reconnect dollars are temporary and are expected to run out this September. Without a sustainable investment, Rhode Island risks losing momentum at a time when our multilingual student population continues to grow and when the demand for bilingual educators is greater than ever.

This legislation is not simply about language instruction. It is about educational equity, workforce development, economic competitiveness, and ensuring all students feel seen, valued, and empowered in our schools.

Research consistently shows that bilingual education benefits all students academically, socially, and economically. Students who maintain and develop proficiency in multiple languages are better prepared for the global workforce, and employers increasingly seek multilingual talent across industries including healthcare, education, business, public service, and technology.

As someone who has dedicated much of my public service career to expanding educational opportunities, I strongly believe Rhode Island has an opportunity to lead by

investing in sustainable bilingual education programming in our traditional public schools and by supporting the pipeline of bilingual educators our state urgently needs.

I also want to recognize the incredible advocacy and leadership of Representative Morales and the many students, families, educators, and community advocates who continue to push for a more inclusive and equitable educational system for all Rhode Islanders.

I respectfully urge the committee to support the SABLE Act and provide sustainable funding that allows this important work to continue and grow for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Rhode Island students and families.

Sandra Cano

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