

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

March 23, 2026

I am submitting this testimony in support of Rhode Island General Assembly Bill HB 7055/SB2501- Longevity Pay for public employees.

I serve as the Vice President of the Professional Staff Association at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI-PSA). I support the General Assembly Bill HB7055/SB2501, to provide public sector workers with the ability to negotiate longevity payments in future contract negotiations.

I offer my testimony based on my experience of working in higher education for over 25 years. Many in higher education work an additional job due to the pay structure in place, which does not allow for much growth or sustainable wages. The limited opportunities for growth result in frustration, which in turn leads to some highly knowledgeable and skilled staff members leaving the college. This is not because they want to, but because the lack of salary growth becomes an overwhelming deciding factor.

Some of the most compassionate and highly skilled staff, therefore, leave the college with valuable institutional knowledge; this is a loss for the state.

CCRI is an educational hub for the state of Rhode Island and provides training opportunities for Rhode Islanders to begin careers as health care professionals, business leaders, positions in technical career fields, and many other areas in the state's workforce.

CCRI is an integral part of the state's economic system along with RIC and URI. The opportunity to negotiate longevity pay which is necessary to retain talented, knowledgeable, and skilled staff members within the public higher education system by providing the necessary compensation growth. Longevity pay would be a positive step toward meeting this goal.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Deb Watson

VP Professional Staff Association- (CCRIPSA)

Associate Director Academic and Career Enrollment

Community College of Rhode Island