

Date: March 2, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

I offer this testimony as a higher education enrollment professional who is deeply concerned about the policies and practices of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the profound impact they have on students of color pursuing post-secondary education.

In my work, I regularly receive calls from students who are afraid to complete their college applications, apply for financial aid, or even visit campus, fearing that they or their family members may be questioned or detained by ICE. I am also approached by international students who are afraid to leave campus or return home to visit their families, worried that they may not be able to re-enter the United States to complete their studies. Fear and uncertainty should never be barriers to education, yet for many students today, they are.

At its core, H-7436 is about the kind of state we want Rhode Island to be. We can choose to invest our public resources in systems that detain and incarcerate, or we can choose to invest in education, opportunity, and the future of our communities.

I respectfully urge you to support H-7436 and ensure that the State of Rhode Island does not renew contracts, agreements, or funding arrangements connected to Immigration and Customs Enforcement or the federal penitentiary system.

Across the country, enforcement policies carried out by ICE have had significant consequences for higher education. Increased enforcement activity and restrictive localized measures have created environments of fear and uncertainty that disproportionately affect students of color. These conditions contribute to chronic absenteeism, lower academic performance, and significant emotional distress. For many students, these pressures ultimately lead to increased college attrition rates, particularly among Latinx students.

Rhode Island's Latinx population is one of the fastest-growing segments of the state, now comprising approximately 18–19% of the overall population and an increasing share of Rhode Island's college-age residents. Nearly half of Latinx undergraduates are first-generation college students, making them more likely than any other racial or ethnic group to be the first in their families to pursue higher education. Policies that create fear and instability for immigrant communities directly undermine the educational progress of these students and weaken the future of our state's workforce.

Given Rhode Island's growing Latinx population and the increasing number of college-age students from immigrant communities, the educational disruptions associated with aggressive federal immigration policies have implications far beyond individual students. Chronic absenteeism, lower academic performance, and increased dropout rates will not only affect educational attainment but will also have long-term economic consequences for Rhode Island by reducing workforce participation, limiting earning potential, and constraining the talent pipeline our state depends on.

There is little doubt that investing in education produces far greater long-term benefits than supporting systems of detention and incarceration. Supporting H-7436 is a meaningful step toward aligning Rhode Island's policies with those values.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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