

March 17, 2026

Testimony on behalf of H.7976

Provided by: Mark Antonucci, CEO of the University of Rhode Island Foundation and Vice President for Advancement, URI

- Good evening Chair Alzate and honorable members of the Special Legislation Committee.
- My name is Mark Antonucci, I am the Chief Executive Officer of the University of Rhode Island Foundation and Vice President for Advancement for URI.
- Here to speak in support of H. 7976 - **legislation that will recognize the largest single gift to the University's football program from URI athletic hall of famer and class of 1981 alum, Mark Cruise.**
- I'd like to thank Rep. Kathy Fogarty for sponsoring the bill.
- Coming from a large family with limited means, Mark Cruise fully understands the value of a college scholarship. Mark recalls his father, who worked for the New England Telephone Company at the time, telling his son that he was going to college and "had to figure it out" on making that happen.
- When it came time to decide on a college, URI offered Cruise a full scholarship to play football in Kingston, and Cruise flourished.
- Starting as a true freshman and every game of his four-year career, Cruise was selected as the team's Most Valuable Player by the Providence Grid Iron Club in the fall of 1980 during his senior season.
- The team's co-captain also earned second-team All-Yankee Conference while recording 71 tackles and three interceptions that year.
- Cruise, who signed free-agent contracts with the New England Patriots and Dallas Cowboys, was inducted into the URI Athletic Hall of Fame in 2002.
- Professionally, Cruise founded the Virtus Group in 2003, a financial consulting firm based in Providence, and has more than 40 years' experience helping families achieve their financial goals and values.

- About a decade ago, Mark began contributing back to his alma mater the scholarship he earned from URI as he promised in his estate plan. He felt the best way to aid URI was to provide scholarship funding and give student-athletes with limited financial means the opportunity to succeed.
- Observing the impact of that original gift, Sue and Mark initiated discussions about doing more, which led to his historic gift last fall. This \$2 million gift not only comes from a Rhody football legend and his wife, but it also builds on the positive momentum that URI's football program has gained over the last six seasons both on the field and off.
- URI football is coming off its most successful season in four decades. In 2025, the Rams compiled an 11-3 overall record, including an undefeated 8-0 record in Coastal Athletic Association conference play—winning the regular-season conference championship for a second year in a row. The football team also earned a NCAA FCS Division I Tournament berth for a second straight season and advanced to the tournament's second round.
- Also, URI football under Head Coach Jim Fleming has won 10 or more games in back-to-back seasons for the first time since the 1984 and 1985 seasons. Since 2020, URI football has netted a 43-16 overall record and has compiled six straight winning seasons, the longest streak in the program's 131-year history.
- The University is incredibly grateful for the generosity of the Cruises and we ask for your support of H 7976 to rename URI's football practice field to the Mark S. Cruise '81, '84 Football Practice Field.
- Thank you for your consideration.