



Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE)

at Roger Williams University

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March 18, 2025

**To: Rhode Island House State Government & Elections Committee**

**Subject: Testimony in Support of House Bill 5382**

Dear Members of the House State Government & Elections Committee,

My name is Keith Catone, and I am writing on behalf of the Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE) in **support** of House Bill 5382. CYCLE works closely with youth leaders from across New England, including many here in the state of Rhode Island. Young people have unique perspectives and important ideas when it comes to improving our communities. H5382 would support the ability of young people who are at least 16 years-old to **have more of a voice** in shaping the decisions that impact the most important public institutions that serve them: **their schools**. By affording young people who at least 16 years-old the right to vote in local school committee elections, elected school committee members will be **held accountable to the constituency that should matter the most in our schools: the students**.

CYCLE believes that high-quality public schools and equitable educational systems are the cornerstone of an authentic democracy and a just society. We also believe strongly in the wisdom and power of young people to engage in decision-making processes that too often exclude them. Youth are the most talked about and least consulted constituency in our public schools. As Rhode Island has taken positive steps to improve civic education in our state, it is time we also expand our democratic practices so that we do not just talk about how to improve schools for young people without providing them a seat at the table. Supporting 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school committee elections will not only help hold the elected officials most directly responsible for public education accountable to the needs of students, it will also **strengthen the future of our democratic systems in Rhode Island**.

In a time when politics and elections might be alienating for many due to the division and vitriol we see too often playing out nationally, we can send a message to the young people of Rhode Island that we are invested in them, invested in our democracy, and invested in our collective future that will require their leadership and wisdom. We urge the House State Government & Elections Committee to support and **pass House Bill 5382**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Catone". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Keith" and last name "Catone" clearly visible.

Keith Catone, Ed.D.

Executive Director

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