



To: House Committee on State Government & Elections

From: Erich Haslehurst

Date: April 3, 2025

Re: H5459 – RESOLUTION TO APPROVE, PUBLISH AND SUBMIT TO THE ELECTORS A PROPOSITION OF AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION -- RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE EDUCATION

Dear Chairman Shanely and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the National Education Association Rhode Island and our 12,000 members to express our strong support for H5459, introduced by Representative Messier.

Public education serves as the foundation of our democracy, and it is imperative that every child is granted access to a quality public education, regardless of their race, gender, or zip code. The ongoing lack of adequate funding for schools underscores the necessity of ensuring that public schools offer a quality education.

Despite the importance we place on advancing education in our state, the Rhode Island Constitution does not explicitly recognize a right to education. Because of this, we strongly believe that Rhode Island must adopt a constitutional right to education and support this being presented to the voters of Rhode Island in the upcoming general election letting them decide if this should be a part of our constitution.

This amendment enjoys broad support. In fact, the following recommendation is from RI Foundation Long Term Education Planning Committee 2023:

Amend Article I of the Rhode Island Constitution – In 1995 and again in 2010, Rhode Island's State Supreme Court held that Article XII, the Education Article, did not confer education as a right and thus was not subject to Article I's Equal Protection Clause. In her 1995 opinion, Justice Lederberg wrote, "The education clause confers no such right, nor does it guarantee an equal, adequate, meaningful education." We propose to amend Article I of the Constitution by adding the following: "Public education is a fundamental right of all Rhode Island residents. It shall, therefore, be the paramount duty of the general assembly, the department of elementary and secondary education, and other government agencies to provide all Rhode Island residents with equal opportunities to receive an education that is adequate and meaningful to permit them to achieve at high levels and to become lifelong learners, productive workers, and responsible citizens."

By establishing a constitutional guarantee for education, we can hold accountable any systems that are failing to provide children with the education they deserve, as this guarantee would be legally enforceable.

On April 2, 2025, the Senate Committee on Education voted in favor of this bill and it will now go before the full Senate for consideration. For these reasons, we encourage you to pass H5459.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Erich Haslehurst