



**March 9, 2026**

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair  
House State Government & Elections Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 7091 – RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- GENERAL PROVISIONS**

Chair Shanley and Members of the State Government & Elections Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we strongly support **House Bill No. 5382**, which would allow **16-year-old residents and 17-year-old residents to vote in school committee elections** in municipalities where school committees are elected.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We advance policies that expand opportunity, strengthen civic participation, and ensure young people, especially those most affected by school governance, have a meaningful voice in decisions that shape their education and future.

House Bill No. 5382 is a practical step to strengthen student voice and foster early civic participation. School committee decisions directly shape learning environments, district priorities, budgets, and accountability. Allowing 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds to vote in these elections ensures that students—those most directly impacted by school governance—can participate in selecting the leaders responsible for decisions that influence their day-to-day educational experience.

This policy is also aligned with equitable civic engagement. Students and families in historically underrepresented communities often experience the greatest impact of school-system decisions. Expanding the eligible electorate for school committee elections creates a pathway for more representative participation and helps ensure community governance reflects the voices of those closest to the classroom.

Communities in other states have adopted similar local reforms, including **Takoma Park, Maryland** and **Berkeley, California**, demonstrating that youth voting can be implemented successfully and can strengthen long-term civic habits. Research also indicates that voting at a younger age is associated with a higher likelihood of continued participation over time, helping to build a durable culture of engagement and informed citizenship.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for **House Bill No. 5382**. This bill is a strategy to strengthen civic participation in education governance by ensuring that students have a direct voice in the school committee elections that shape their learning environments and future opportunities.

Sincerely,



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