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Rhode Island Works Best When We Say UNION YES.

March 10, 2026

Chairman Evan P. Shanley
House State Government and Elections
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of HB7091

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the 80,000 union members of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO and our affiliated local unions, I write in support of House Bill 7091, introduced by Representative Felix. This legislation would allow cities and towns to permit 16 and 17-year-old residents to register and vote in local school committee elections.

Labor unions are inherently democratic institutions. Our members elect their leadership, vote on contracts, and advocate for policies that directly shape their workplaces and communities. It is because of this democratic foundation that the labor movement has long supported efforts that expand civic participation and engagement. House Bill 7091 represents an opportunity to do exactly that.

This legislation would allow municipalities to give young people a voice in school committee elections, the same local body that makes decisions about school facilities, disciplinary policies, arts and sports funding, curriculum governance, and the health and wellness of students and employees. Students experience the direct impact of these decisions every day.

Research consistently shows that when young people are given the opportunity to vote earlier, they often participate at higher rates than older first-time voters and are more likely to remain civically engaged over time. Building a culture rooted in civic engagement is essential to a healthy democracy where people are more invested in their local community.

Supporting policies that engage the next generation of voters is consistent with the labor movement's long history of advocating for expanded democratic participation. Whether that's fighting for access to fair and just union elections on the job or protecting voting rights and access to the polls in our local communities, democracy is rooted in our foundation.

House Bill 7091 is an intentional step toward strengthening civic participation across Rhode Island. By giving students a voice in the decisions that directly impact their education, you'll help cultivate lifelong voters and more engaged community members. For these reasons, the Rhode Island AFL-CIO respectfully urges the Committee to support House Bill 7091.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erica A. Hammond'.

Erica A. Hammond
Legislative Director, Rhode Island AFL-CIO

Patrick Crowley President • Karen Hazard Secretary-Treasurer
Cheryl Masciarelli Office Manager • Autumn Guillotte Political Director • Erica Hammond Legislative Director

