

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2079

Dr. Victoria Quinn, 11 March 2026

Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill No. 2079.

My name is Dr. Victoria Quinn. I am a physician in our only Pediatric Emergency Department in Rhode Island. I have also been heavily involved with HeartSAFE Schools Rhode Island - an initiative to partner with our schools and prepare them to respond in the event of a sudden cardiac arrest on school grounds.

Sudden cardiac arrest, someone dropping dead in front of you, is just something that we hear about on the news right? It's not something that happens to us! Until it does.

And it has. A teacher at a middle school in Warren collapsed and died because no one recognized sudden cardiac arrest. Another story but with a different ending - a 17 year old collapsed on the field at a high school in Providence but by the time they got to our Emergency Department, they were awake and talking because the athletic trainer immediately recognized cardiac arrest, started CPR and used an AED.

The difference in the outcome of these two stories highlights how prepared those schools were to respond. They also highlight two things that are crucial to being prepared, and two things this bill supports: having a functional AED on site, and having a cardiac emergency response plan in place.

I have spent much of the last four years partnering with Rhode Island high schools to try and accomplish those two things. What I have found is a vast willingness from the school nurses, principles, teachers and coaches. They want to be prepared. Sudden cardiac arrest in one of their students or colleagues is something they fear. Through many discussions together, we've discovered the largest barrier to successfully implementing cardiac emergency response plans and maintaining AED's is a lack of guidance from the state level. Without a requirement to do so, there is a trickle down effect that translates into a lack of buy-in and a lack of follow-through. But it's not because they don't want to!

In fact, of 17 public high schools across Rhode Island who partnered with our team at HeartSAFE Schools RI, zero schools had any form of a cardiac emergency response plan prior to our partnership. But after just one year with our support, 95% of them had successfully developed a cardiac emergency response team, a written response plan, and had successfully run drills with local EMS crews to practice how they would respond to a sudden cardiac arrest.

Our schools are capable, they are eager, and they are willing. They want to be prepared. And in order for this momentum to continue, and to broaden the impact across all our Rhode Island schools, we need Senate Bill 2079 to pass.

I urge you to support this bill, so that the next story we hear on the news about a cardiac arrest in our schools is a story about a life saved.