



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
AFL - CIO

To: Senate Education Committee
From: Maribeth Calabro, President
Date: April 28, 2026
Re: **Expanding Access to High-Quality Pre-K**
Testimony in Support of 2026-S 3147 (Senator Gallo, et. al.)

Chairperson Gallo and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am Maribeth Calabro, President of the RIFTHP, representing over 12,000 educators and professionals dedicated to the success of Rhode Island's children.

The RIFTHP strongly supports S 3147, the companion to House Bill 8163. This legislation addresses the critical developmental window where we can most effectively level the playing field for our students.

As educators, we are acutely aware of the "word gap" research, which reveals that children from lower-income households often hear millions fewer words than their peers before the age of four. This is not just a vocabulary deficit; it is a literacy hurdle that becomes harder to overcome every year a child is left without support. By passing S 3147, we ensure that high-quality, language-rich environments are accessible to every child, closing that gap before it ever reaches the elementary school door.

Furthermore, the structure and socialization provided by high-quality pre-K are irreplaceable. These formative years are the prime time to develop the "soft skills" that define a successful citizen.

Socialization is a developmentally important skill that is enhanced during the pre-kindergarten educational experience. In a guided classroom, children move from parallel play to collaborative interaction, learning the fundamental skills of sharing and kindness.

A structured pre-K environment provides the safe "sandbox" needed for imaginative exploration, allowing creativity to flourish under the mentorship of trained professionals. Creativity is a cornerstone of 21st Century skill development that enhances brain development at an early age.

Emotional Regulation: Learning how to navigate a group setting fosters the resilience and empathy required for later life.

Critically, S 3147 recognizes that student success is linked to the professional development of our workforce. Expanding pre-K is only effective if the educators in those classrooms are supported. This legislation provides the necessary framework for specialized training in early childhood pedagogy, ensuring our members have the tools to manage complex social-emotional needs and diverse learning styles. By investing in the continuous growth and certification of our teachers, we ensure that "universal" pre-K also means "high-quality" pre-K.

S 3147 is not just about daycare; it is about providing the essential foundation for a child's cognitive and social development while empowering the professionals who guide them. I respectfully urge the Senate Committee on Education to pass this legislation.

Sincerely,
Maribeth Calabro
President, RIFTHP

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