



June 4, 2026

Rhode Island Senate Committee on Education
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony in Support of S 3289, An Act Relating to Education – Access for Congressionally Chartered Youth Development Organizations, Senate Education Committee

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Committee Members:

My name is Tiana, and I serve as the Chief Program Officer at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island. I am a licensed clinical social worker with extensive experience supporting young people and families in community-based, clinical, and educational environments. I write today to express strong support for Senate Bill 3289.

At its core, this bill addresses access, which serves as the foundation for opportunity.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is a congressionally chartered youth development organization with a decades-long record of matching young people with caring adult mentors. These mentors support youth in navigating school, building confidence, and developing essential skills for success. Research on mentorship is clear: young people with consistent, supportive relationships with non-parental adults demonstrate significantly better outcomes in academic engagement, social-emotional development, and long-term economic mobility.

However, none of these outcomes are possible if we cannot reach the young people who need support most. As a clinician, I have worked with children and adolescents who struggle not due to a lack of potential, but because they are unaware that support is available. Schools frequently serve as the only consistent point of contact for the most vulnerable youth in our communities. When organizations cannot access these environments, it is not merely a missed recruitment opportunity; it represents a missed opportunity to support a child.

S 3289 establishes a structured, reasonable, and respectful process for organizations such as ours to engage with schools. The bill is attentive to instructional time, preserves parental rights through advance notification and the option to withhold consent, and safeguards school safety and administrative authority. It does not impose a mandate but instead provides a framework. This framework is essential to our capacity to serve Rhode Island's youth consistently and equitably.

IT TAKES LITTLE TO BE BIG

From a programmatic and systems perspective, the young people who benefit most from mentorship are often the most difficult to reach through traditional outreach methods. Many do not have caregivers who can attend community events or families engaged with external organizations. Schools provide the primary setting where these youth can be reached. This bill addresses that reality.

I respectfully urge the committee to advance S 3289. Rhode Island's young people deserve the opportunity to be aware of available support, and organizations deserve the opportunity to provide it.

Respectfully,

Tiana Ochoa Teo

Tiana Ochoa Teo, MSW, LICSW
Chief Program Officer
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rhode Island

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