

In support of funding for Rhode Island College

I am writing on behalf of the RIC/AFT Local 1819, the union of full-time faculty at Rhode Island College. I live in Providence, and I am a professor of sociology at Rhode Island College, as well as president of the RIC/AFT.

We are working hard every day to help make our state a better place to work and live by educating students who are our state's future. Our students become the teachers, nurses, mental health care providers, law enforcement officers, nonprofit managers, cybersecurity professionals—and members of the general assembly—who keep our state running and build our future. Helped by the Hope Scholarship, we are making enormous strides in retaining and graduating students on time and at a lower cost, students who are career and graduate school ready. And we appreciate all that you and your colleagues have done to support Rhode Island College and our students in past budgets, especially the Hope Scholarship.

But the work we do here at RIC keeps getting harder. Our students need more and more support in terms of both academic and nonacademic skills, and because we understand that our job is to meet students where they are, we work harder to develop engaging and relevant curricula that will provide the skills and knowledge necessary for success in our 21st century economy and to provide the support students need outside of the classroom. Changing technological realities and increased regulations, including this spring new Title II regulations for digital accessibility, that add considerably to our workload. Our colleagues are struggling every day with the increased burdens caused by our political context, including risks to the grant funding that pays for their research and mentorship. And this all is occurring in a context in which college finances and employee salaries are not keeping up with the cost of living. Indeed, the Economic Policy Institute has found that the cost of child care is now higher than the cost of tuition here in Rhode Island, and my colleagues are having to take on extra work just to pay their bills.

On top of this, as you all know, higher education is facing unprecedented attacks from Washington. Grants have been terminated, new compliance requirements have been added, and our faculty, staff, and administration have to work every day just to keep up.

We do what we do every day for our students, students who overcome so much to earn the degree that changes their family's lives. Students like S., a veteran of the US marines with a prior career in motorcycle repair who is pursuing his degree while raising young children and who intends to become a tax lawyer. Students like J., a former Department of Corrections Officer earning her MSW so that she can help build a better Rhode Island. Students like M., who wants to be a crime scene investigator after she finishes her degree while working six to seven nights a week sorting mail to provide for herself and her disabled father.

Rhode Island College works because we work. Our institution needs sufficient funding to weather the current storm. We need sufficient funding to hire the faculty and staff who work hard every day to provide education and support services to our amazing students, students who will make the future brighter for all of us. We need sufficient funding to continue to provide access to current technology, to meet growing federal regulations, and to ensure our students have the best possible outcomes. We cannot afford to go backwards. Please support at least the current service level for Rhode Island College in the budget—and we would put more funding to even greater use. Help us keep doing our best for our students, our college, and our state.

Thank you for everything you do for Rhode Island College and for the State of Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur, President, RIC/AFT Local 1819
Resident, Providence, 02906