

March 10, 2026

The Honorable Senator Louis P. DiPalma
Chairman, House Finance Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Subject: Letter of Support, Rhode Island College Hope Scholarship, House Bill 7127, Article 7, sections 4 & 5

Dear Chairman DiPalma:

I am writing to express my support for Governor McKee's budget article 7, sections 4 and 5, establishing the Rhode Island College Hope Scholarship as a permanent scholarship.

Last year, the national average college debt was over \$30,000 per student. Obtaining a college education is an expensive investment in Rhode Island and a powerful tool for economic mobility. Student success leads to building and sustaining a healthy state economy.

The Hope Scholarship makes college education in Rhode Island an affordable reality and incentivizes a four-year degree completion. Data from Rhode Island College indicates that in FY26, there are 572 scholarship-eligible students, meaning 572 RIC juniors and seniors that this scholarship is making college more affordable for just this year. Rhode Island College's November 2025 report indicates that they anticipate 770 Hope Scholarship recipients in FY27, demonstrating the program's growth. The college reported in August 2025 that they saw a 9.6% increase of in-state applications for the Fall 2025 semester and have the largest freshman class in 15 years. The administration attributes this to the Hope Scholarship and the increased return on investment of a RIC degree as a result.

Graduating college within four years is important because it not only saves money spent on tuition but is an economic indicator. Studies show that students who graduate within four years have higher post-college earnings over their lifetime compared with peers who did not graduate on time. The on-time completion component of the Hope scholarship helps boost Rhode Islanders' life-long earnings, ultimately helping the State's economy. It is important to remember that over 70% of students who graduated from Rhode Island remain in the state after graduation. These graduates are Rhode Island's future teachers, nurses, social workers, cyber security analysis, and so much more.

Permanently codifying the Hope Scholarship will allow future cohorts of Rhode Island students to take advantage of this exciting program. The future of Rhode Island depends on the investments we make in our students. The Hope Scholarship provides our students with an affordable option for college and subsequent employment success. I thank the committee for its consideration of this bill and encourage the committee to support it for passage.



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Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Gilkey'.

Shannon Gilkey, Ed.D.
Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

cc: The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Finance
Mr. Steven Hayes, Esq. Chief Legal Counsel to the President of the Senate