



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

To: Senate Finance Committee
From: Maribeth Calabro, President
Date: March 12, 2026
Re: **Hope Scholarship**
Testimony in **Support** of 2026-H 7127 Article 7 Hope Scholarship

Chair, members of the committee, and distinguished legislators, thank you for your time and for your commitment to Rhode Island's students. My name is Maribeth Calabro, and I am the President of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals and a proud RI College alum. I am writing to you on behalf of our educators, school staff, three locals we represent at Rhode Island College, and the thousands of Rhode Island families, we serve to express strong support for making the Hope Scholarship a permanent benefit for students at Rhode Island College.

The Hope Scholarship is not an abstract policy idea. It is a real, measurable lifeline for students who are on the cusp of completing their degrees but too often fall short because of financial barriers. In its first year alone, more than 200 Rhode Island College students were able to continue their education because of this program. These are students who have already invested years of effort and demonstrated the determination to succeed. The scholarship simply gave them the chance to finish what they started.

We know what happens when students are given that chance. Rhode Island College has reported higher retention and higher on time graduation rates among Hope Scholarship recipients. These outcomes are not accidental. They reflect what educators see every day: when financial stress is reduced, students stay enrolled, stay focused and on track to graduate.

The Hope Scholarship also advances equity in a meaningful way. A significant share of recipients are first-generation college students, students who struggle financially, and students of color. Rhode Island students that have historically faced the steepest obstacles to completing a bachelor's degree. When we remove those obstacles, we don't just help individual students; we strengthen entire communities.

This program is also a workforce strategy. Rhode Island faces well-documented shortages in education, healthcare, behavioral health, and social services. Many Hope Scholarship recipients are preparing to enter these very fields. By helping them complete their degrees, we are investing directly in the workforce that keeps our state functioning—our teachers, nurses, social workers, and public-sector professionals.

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The Hope Scholarship is a smart use of public dollars. It is targeted, efficient, and designed to support students who are already close to graduation. It is a last-dollar scholarship, meaning it fills only the remaining gap after federal and state aid. And it is tied to a requirement that students live, work, or continue their education in Rhode Island, ensuring that the benefits of this investment stay here at home.

Most importantly, the Hope Scholarship aligns with our values as a state. Rhode Island has long believed in the power of public education to transform lives. We believe that talent exists in every community, and that cost should never be the barrier that stops a capable student from earning a degree. Making the Hope Scholarship permanent is a statement that we stand by those values—not just for one cohort of students, but for every generation to come.

On behalf of RI Federation of Teachers, our members, and the students and families we serve, I urge you to make the Hope Scholarship a permanent fixture of Rhode Island’s higher-education landscape. The early results are clear. The need is undeniable. And the return on investment for our workforce, our economy, and our communities—is profound.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to Rhode Island’s students.