



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

To: Senate Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: May 19, 2026
Re: School Social Worker Staffing
Testimony in **Support of S 2245** (Sosnowski, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of S 2245, legislation that establishes minimum staffing ratios for certified school social workers in Rhode Island public schools and provides additional funding to support implementation.

Rhode Island educators are increasingly working with students facing significant mental health challenges, trauma, housing instability, food insecurity, chronic absenteeism, and behavioral needs that directly affect learning outcomes. Schools have become critical access points for mental health services and family support, yet many districts lack adequate staffing to meet these growing needs.

School social workers provide essential services including crisis intervention, behavioral supports, attendance interventions, family engagement, mental health referrals, and coordination of wraparound services. These supports improve student well-being while also helping create safer, more stable learning environments for students and educators.

Establishing a minimum staffing ratio of one certified school social worker for every 250 students recognizes that student wellness is foundational to academic success. The additional appropriation included in the bill represents an investment in prevention, early intervention, and long-term student outcomes rather than delayed responses to escalating needs.

Educators cannot be expected to absorb increasing social, emotional, and behavioral challenges without adequate professional support systems within schools. Strengthening access to school social workers helps support students, families, and the educators working to meet increasingly complex needs in classrooms every day.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support S 2245.

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