



**May 19, 2026**

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma, Chair  
Senate Finance Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2245 — EDUCATION EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT**

Chair DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, I write in strong support of **Senate Bill 2245**, which would require all public schools in grades K–12 to maintain at least one full-time certified school social worker for every 250 students and would appropriate an additional **\$2 million in FY 2027** to help school districts and municipalities employ additional social workers.

United Way’s policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public systems deliver measurable value. This includes centering ALICE households — **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed** — families and individuals who are working, yet remain priced out of financial stability by the high cost of living. The ALICE framework recognizes that basic household needs include housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology.

For many ALICE households, instability at home, work, or school can quickly affect a child’s well-being and academic success. School social workers are often a critical link between students, families, educators, and community-based supports. They help identify needs early, connect families to resources, support student mental health, and address barriers to learning before they escalate.

In 2023–2024, nearly **one in three Rhode Island children ages 3 to 17 — 29% — had a mental, emotional, or behavioral health problem**. The latest KidsCount Factbook also reports that **50% of Rhode Island children ages 3 to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care**. These findings underscore the importance of having trained professionals in schools who can identify needs earlier, support students directly, and connect families to appropriate care.

S 2245 reflects an important investment in student well-being, prevention, and school stability. The National Association of Social Workers recommends a ratio of **one school social worker for every 250 students**, with lower ratios when students have more intensive needs. School social workers provide direct and indirect mental health services, help remove barriers to learning, strengthen family engagement, support school safety, and connect students and families to needed services.



This support is especially important as schools continue to respond to student behavioral health needs, trauma, housing instability, food insecurity, and other challenges that affect learning. By strengthening school social work capacity, Rhode Island can help ensure that students receive support earlier and that families are better connected to the services they need.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee to support **Senate Bill 2245**. This bill is a timely step toward ensuring Rhode Island students have access to the in-school supports they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Elijah McLean**

Manager, Government Relations & Policy  
United Way of Rhode Island