



**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 2452 — BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME**

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 2452**, which would establish the **Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time** program and allocate **\$100,000 in FY 2026–2027** to support evidence-informed out-of-school time initiatives that promote the mental health and emotional well-being of children and youth.

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 ALICE families, high-quality out-of-school time programs provide critical supervision, enrichment, connection, and stability beyond the school day. These programs are trusted, community-based spaces where young people can build relationships with caring adults, strengthen social-emotional skills, and access support before challenges escalate.

The **2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook** reinforces the need for this investment. In 2023–2024, nearly **one in three Rhode Island children ages 3 to 17 — 29% — had a mental, emotional, or behavioral health problem**, and **50% of children who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care**. KIDS COUNT also reports that **22,985 Rhode Island children are enrolled in out-of-school time programs, while an estimated 66,025 are not enrolled but would participate if opportunities were available**.

S 2452 responds to this need by strengthening the capacity of community-based and school-affiliated out-of-school time programs serving students in kindergarten through grade 12. The bill allows funds to support mental health first aid training, trauma-informed practices, mentoring, restorative practices, youth-led initiatives, social-emotional learning, and other



culturally responsive approaches that promote connection, belonging, prevention, and early identification of need.

This is a timely investment in youth well-being, family stability, and community-based prevention. At a time when children, families, schools, and community providers are carrying increased strain, out-of-school time programs can serve as an essential layer of support outside the school day.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee to support **Senate Bill 2452**. This bill is a thoughtful and community-centered investment in the well-being of Rhode Island children, youth, and families.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

**Elijah McLean**

Manager, Government Relations & Policy  
United Way of Rhode Island