



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 2548 — 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 2548**, which would strengthen state support for extraordinary special education costs by revising the reimbursement threshold in fiscal years 2028 and 2029. The bill would also provide funding in the following fiscal year for approved excess costs associated with special education students who move into a district after the district has approved its fiscal year budget. This is an important equity-focused improvement that would help school districts respond to high-cost student needs without destabilizing local budgets.

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 families, strong and adequately supported special education services are essential to child development, learning, and long-term stability. The **2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook** reports that as of June 2025, **23,740 students in grades K–12 — 18% of all K–12 students — were receiving special education services through Rhode Island public schools**. KIDS COUNT also notes that students in the five core cities were more likely to receive special education services than students in the remainder of the state, underscoring the importance of funding approaches that reflect student need across districts.

When districts face extraordinary costs or unexpected midyear enrollment changes, the impact can strain local budgets and create pressure across school systems. S 2548 recognizes that the state has a role in helping districts meet these obligations while protecting educational quality for all students.



The evidence is clear that sustained and equitable education funding improves student outcomes, especially for students from low-income households and students who need additional supports. Research has shown that increased school spending can lead to higher educational attainment, higher adult wages, and lower adult poverty, with especially strong gains for children from low-income families. Stable access to special education services is also critical to ensuring students with disabilities can remain connected to school, complete high school, and pursue postsecondary and workforce opportunities.

S 2548 would help ensure that resources better follow actual student need. By strengthening reimbursement for extraordinary special education costs and accounting for students who move into a district after a budget has already been approved, this bill gives districts a more reliable way to serve students with significant needs while planning responsibly.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges the Committee to support **Senate Bill 2548**. Improving Rhode Island's approach to extraordinary special education costs is a meaningful step toward ensuring students with disabilities have access to the supports they need to learn, develop, and thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island