

Coalition for a Multilingual RI
122 Manton Ave, Unit 611, Box 8
Providence, RI 02909
www.multilingualri.org
@MultilingualRI



Date: May 19, 2026

Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The Coalition for a Multilingual Rhode Island (30+ member organizations and counting) strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 2555, which would establish teacher certification support for multilingual undergraduates and adults pursuing certification as bilingual, dual language (BDL), and world language (WL) educators. The bill would also create a dual language program fund to help districts start, expand, and strengthen PK–12 dual language programs.

This legislation represents a crucial and timely investment in addressing Rhode Island’s educator shortage, particularly the shortage of linguistically and culturally diverse educators, while also strengthening our state’s economic future.

Rhode Island is at a critical moment. Our state faces a growing educator shortage, especially bilingual education teachers. At the same time, updated RIDE regulations for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) prioritize dual language bilingual education program models, reflecting both research and strong public support. However, without strategic investment in both the educator pipeline and program expansion, implementation of these models will fall short.

The need is urgent. According to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, only 5% (227) of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held relevant bilingual or ESL certification in 20. By 2025, that number dropped to just 1% (122). Meanwhile, only 3% of Rhode Island’s Multilingual Learners are enrolled in dual language programs, largely due to a lack of qualified educators. Senate Bill 2555 directly addresses both sides of this challenge: building the educator pipeline and expanding high-quality programs.

Rhode Island’s multilingual community is full of talented individuals ready to teach, but systemic and financial barriers prevent many from entering the profession. This bill removes those barriers by providing targeted scholarships and support.



At the same time, the dual language program fund will ensure districts have the resources needed to expand access to these proven, high-impact programs.

The benefits of bilingual and dual language education are well documented:

- **Academic Success:** Students in dual language programs outperform their peers in reading and long-term academic achievement.
- **Cognitive Development:** Bilingual individuals demonstrate stronger executive functioning, improving problem-solving and adaptability.
- **Social-Emotional Growth:** Students gain greater cultural awareness, empathy, and communication skills.
- **Economic Opportunity:** Bilingual workers are in high demand. Nine out of ten U.S. employers seek employees with language skills, and bilingual workers earn 5–20% more than their monolingual peers.

Bilingual education is not just an academic strategy—it is an economic *necessity*. Rhode Island’s key industries, including healthcare, education, hospitality, and international business, depend on a multilingual workforce. Without investment, our state risks falling behind others that are prioritizing bilingual education as an economic driver.

Dual language programs are also cost-effective. They are long-term cost-neutral for districts, often utilizing shared instructional models. However, initial investment is essential to expand access and ensure sustainability.

Importantly, this work is already underway. The Coalition for a Multilingual Rhode Island is actively collaborating with the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner and RI Reconnect to support aspiring educators, and the Coalition launched our Preparing Rhode Island Multilingual Educators (PRIME) initiative last fall and as of today, has connected with 200+ multilingual adults in Rhode Island interested in becoming educators. With passage of SABE we could continue this momentum and make real, actionable change.

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This is not a starting point—it is a moment of acceleration. With new MLL regulations, strong cross-sector partnerships, and growing demand from students and employers alike, Rhode Island is well-positioned to not just catch up, but lead the nation in bilingual education.

Passing Senate Bill 2555 is a smart, strategic investment in our students, our workforce, and our economy. It will help remove barriers to the teaching profession, expand access to high-quality dual language programs, and ensure that Rhode Island students are prepared to succeed in an increasingly globalized world.

We urge you to support Senate Bill 2555.

Sincerely,

Coalition for a Multilingual Rhode Island

1. AMOR
2. ARISE
3. BLMRIPAC
4. Cape Verdean American Community
5. Central Falls School District
6. Central Providence Opportunities: A Health Equity Zone (CPO HEZ)
7. Conexión Latina Newport
8. DORCAS
9. Economic Progress Institute
10. Institute for Portuguese and Lusophone Studies
11. Latino Policy Institute
12. MA TESOL Bilingual Dual Language at University of Rhode Island
13. Multistate Association for Bilingual Education
14. Olneyville Neighborhood Association
15. Pangea Arts
16. Parents Leading for Educational Equity

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MULTILINGUAL RI

17. Progreso Latino
18. Refugee Dream Center
19. RI Interfaith Coalition
20. RI KIDS Count
21. RI School for the Deaf
22. RIAATF
23. Rhode Island Community and Justice
24. RIFLA
25. RITELL
26. Storytime Online
27. URI International Engineering Program
28. Women's Refugee Center
29. Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
30. Young Voices