



Testimony in Support
An Act Relating To Education- The Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act
May 19, 2026

The Latino Policy Institute respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of S2555, The Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act. This legislation reflects a critical investment in Rhode Island's students and in the state's long-term educational and economic future.

Rhode Island's student population is increasingly multilingual, multicultural, and diverse. Latino students now represent one of the fastest-growing student populations in the state, and multilingual learners are a significant and growing share of enrollment across many local education agencies. Yet despite this demographic reality, access to high-quality bilingual and dual-language programming remains limited. Currently, only a small percentage of multilingual learners are enrolled in bilingual or dual-language programs, despite clear evidence that these models produce stronger academic, linguistic, and social-emotional outcomes for students.

Decades of research demonstrate that high-quality dual-language programs improve English acquisition while preserving and strengthening students' home languages. These programs are associated with higher academic achievement, stronger attendance, improved graduation outcomes, increased family engagement, and long-term cognitive and workforce advantages. They are not remedial interventions; they are evidence-based educational models that prepare students to thrive in a global economy.

For Rhode Island's Latino families, bilingual education is also deeply connected to cultural affirmation and belonging. When students are able to maintain and develop their home language while mastering English, schools affirm identity rather than requiring assimilation as a condition for academic success. This creates stronger school connectedness and promotes inclusive learning environments that benefit all students.

This legislation addresses one of the most significant barriers to expansion: the shortage of certified bilingual dual-language and world-language educators. By creating a dedicated bilingual education support fund, S2555 would help traditional public school districts, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations build the educator pipeline needed to expand access sustainably. The bill wisely invests both in the direct implementation of dual-language programs and in strengthening teacher certification pathways so Rhode Island can grow and retain a diverse multilingual educator workforce.

This proposal also aligns with Rhode Island's existing commitments, including the Rhode Island Department of Education Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success and state multilingual learner regulations that encourage expanded bilingual programming in districts with high multilingual learner populations. This bill provides the resources necessary to move those commitments from vision to implementation.

Investing \$950,000 annually in bilingual education infrastructure is not simply an education expenditure; it is an investment in Rhode Island's economic competitiveness, workforce development, and educational equity. Rhode Island's future depends on cultivating multilingual talent and ensuring that students' linguistic assets are recognized as strengths to be developed, not barriers to overcome.

The Latino Policy Institute urges the Committee to support S2555 and take this important step toward ensuring that all Rhode Island students have equitable access to the high-quality bilingual education they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration.

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