

TO: Senate Finance Committee

SUBJECT: SUPPORT for the School Social Worker bill (S-2245), the BOOST Bill (S-2452), Support & Access to Bilingual Education (SABE) Act (S-2555) & Healthy School Meals for All (S-2083 & S-2663)

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

My name is Merrill Schmidt, and I live in Cranston. I work with high school students in Providence at a youth-led nonprofit organization that provides out-of-school time education. I also have a three-year old son who I intend to enroll in public school once he is old enough to attend. I'm writing in support of the School Social Worker bill (S-2245), the BOOST Bill (S-2452), the Support and Access to Bilingual Education (SABE) Act (S-2555), and the Healthy School Meals for All bills (S-2083 & S-2663).

The School Social Worker bill (S-2245) would increase access to school social workers by requiring one full-time social worker for every 250 students in K–12 public schools by 2030. This goal is in alignment with the National Association of School Social Workers' recommendations. Based on my work with high school students, having more comprehensive support at school (as well as a less punitive approach) is a very high priority for young people in the state. I have heard about students being unable to access mental health support in Providence public schools when needed, and I have also heard many concerns about the youth mental health crisis. This bill would help address these critical concerns, serving as a strong step in the right direction for the well-being of young people in Rhode Island.

The BOOST bill (S-2452) would provide funding to support the mental health and emotional well-being of children and youth in out-of-school time settings. I believe that the BOOST Bill is an important step for increasing the amount of state funding for afterschool programs that support young people's holistic well-being. In my position, I work to identify and apply for funding sources for afterschool programming, and it has been increasingly difficult to find applicable funding in this fiscal environment. The BOOST Bill will strengthen our out-of-school programming for youth in the state and provide another source of support for addressing the mental health crisis.

The SABE Act (S-2555) would increase funding for multilingual teacher certifications to create job opportunities for Rhode Islanders and invest \$300,000 for districts to start, expand, and improve Pre K-12 dual language programs. Based on the academic literature, dual language programs are proven to improve outcomes for multilingual learners and non-multilingual learners alike. I believe that we should consider multi-lingualism to be an asset for our state, and I think this would greatly benefit the many multilingual learners in our state as well as students who would like to become bilingual. I wish that there were more dual language programs available so that my son could participate when he is enrolled in pre-K.

Finally, I support the Healthy School Meals for All bills (S-2083 & S-2663). These bills would establish a statewide "Healthy School Meals for all" universal school breakfast and lunch program in Rhode Island public schools phased in over 3 years. There is a lot of research showing that students learn better when they are well-fed. Moreover, we should invest in the next generation's well-being, ensuring that no students go hungry while at school.

In conclusion, I urge you to support School Social Worker bill (S-2245), the BOOST Bill (S-2452), Support and Access to Bilingual Education (SABE) Act (S-2555), and Healthy School Meals for All (S-2083 & S-2663). Thanks for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Merrill Schmidt