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May 18, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma
Chair, Committee on Finance
Rhode Island Senate
82 Smith Street
Providence RI, 02903

Chair DiPalma and Honorable Committee Members,

Every Rhode Island student deserves the highest quality education possible for their thriving, graduation, and preparation for success in higher education or in their work. The laws of our state affirm this, with § 42-5.1-1 of the General Laws affirming the right of every resident to nurture their native language while encouraging all residents to become proficient in English to ensure their full participation in civic and cross-cultural life. The current state of education, with the significant shortfall of provision for bilingual and dual language instruction, contradicts that affirmation and forestalls the educational advancement of far too many. That is why I write to you today to strongly support Senate Bill S-2555, the Support and Access to Bilingual Education, or SABE, Act.

High quality dual language bilingual education fosters academic engagement and achievement, reduces chronic absenteeism, and promotes positive social-emotional development. Bilingual and dual language education improves comprehension as well as overall well-being, furthering state strategic priorities concerning equity, achievement, and community engagement. Despite state policy and the calls within Rhode Island Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success for nimbly delivered human or fiscal resources to support multilingual learners, only 8% of those learners are enrolled in a bilingual or dual language program. Eleven districts, including Providence, have high enrollments of multilingual learners and are cannot support them all due to, among other deficiencies, a remarkable shortage of certified bilingual dual language and world language teachers.

The SABE Act would appropriate nine hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$950,000) to establish a bilingual education support fund in furtherance of bilingual education implementation and access, including bilingual dual language and world language teacher certification. Such a dedicated fund could support the diversification of teaching staff, including the entry of trained but otherwise not certified teachers into the profession in support of students with whom they share a language and to whom they are committed. As reflected by our May 7th passage of a resolution supporting the SABE Act, my colleagues and I strongly support the expansion of funding for bilingual education programs in the interest of equity and achievement for all Rhode Island students. I urge to you to strongly support the SABE Act in the same stead.

Sincerely,

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