



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
AFL - CIO

To: Senate Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: May 19, 2026
Re: Support & Access to Bilingual Education (SABE)
Testimony in **Support of S 2555** (McKenney, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of S 2555, legislation that expands access to high-quality bilingual and dual language education programs by investing in the educator workforce and instructional supports needed to serve Rhode Island's growing multilingual learner population.

Rhode Island schools are serving an increasing number of multilingual learners while continuing to face significant shortages of certified bilingual and dual language educators. Many districts, particularly districts with high multilingual learner populations, lack the staffing capacity and resources necessary to expand high-quality bilingual programs despite growing student need. As a result, too many students still lack access to instructional models that research consistently shows improve academic achievement, engagement, attendance, social-emotional outcomes, and long-term educational success.

S 2555 represents an important investment in educational equity, workforce development, and public education. By creating a bilingual education support fund within RIDE, the legislation would help traditional public school districts expand dual language programming, strengthen educator certification pathways, support professional development, and build partnerships among school districts, community organizations, and institutions of higher education.

For educators and school staff, the bill addresses a very real workforce challenge facing Rhode Island schools. Districts across the state continue struggling to recruit and retain certified bilingual educators, particularly in communities with large multilingual learner populations. Expanding certification opportunities and strengthening educator pipelines will help schools better meet student needs while supporting culturally and linguistically responsive instruction statewide.

This legislation also recognizes that multilingualism is a strength. High-quality bilingual and dual language programs help students develop critical language and academic skills, strengthen engagement, improve long-term educational outcomes, and better prepare Rhode Island students for an increasingly multilingual workforce and economy.

RIFTHP supports investments that strengthen public schools, expand educational opportunity, and ensure all students have access to the resources and instruction they need to succeed. S 2555 represents a meaningful step toward those goals.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support S 2555.

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