



May 19, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2555 — THE SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION ACT

Chair DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, I write in strong support of **Senate Bill 2555**, the **Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act**, which would establish a bilingual education support fund within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Beginning in FY 2027, the bill would appropriate **\$950,000 annually** to support dual language programs, expand teaching certifications for bilingual dual language and world language teachers, and provide implementation support.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public systems deliver measurable value. This includes centering ALICE households — **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed** — families and individuals who are working, yet remain priced out of financial stability by the high cost of living. The ALICE framework recognizes that basic household needs include housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology.

S 2555 recognizes that multilingual learners need access to high-quality instruction, culturally responsive educators, and programs that support both English proficiency and native language development. According to the **2026 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook**, multilingual learners represented **16% of Rhode Island's public school student population in the 2024–2025 school year**, with **20,886 students** receiving English language services. KIDS COUNT also reports that **90% of multilingual learners were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch**, underscoring the connection between language access, educational opportunity, and family economic stability.

At the same time, Rhode Island continues to face a shortage of certified bilingual dual language and world language teachers. S 2555 responds by investing in educator certification and expanding the pipeline of teachers prepared to serve multilingual learners. The bill also supports partnerships among school districts, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education, recognizing that strong education systems require collaboration across schools, communities, and workforce partners.



By supporting dual language programs and expanding the bilingual educator pipeline, Rhode Island can better serve multilingual learners, strengthen school engagement, improve academic opportunity, and build a more multilingual and multicultural workforce.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests the Committee to support **Senate Bill 2555**. Investing in bilingual education and educator certification is an investment in students, families, workforce development, and Rhode Island's long-term economic future.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island