



May 14, 2026

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

RE: S 2678

On behalf of the National Education Association of Rhode Island and our 12,000 members, I write in strong support of S 2678, legislation that would increase the monthly minimum death benefit for a spouse, domestic partner, or former spouse of a deceased teacher. This bill represents a thoughtful and necessary step toward ensuring that the families of Rhode Island's educators are treated with dignity and fairness.

The Teacher Survivor Benefit is a critical support for the loved ones of educators who dedicated their careers to serving our students and communities. Importantly, this benefit is funded by contributions from teachers working in districts that do not participate in Social Security. These educators have consistently paid into a separate system with the understanding that it would provide meaningful support to their survivors. The fund that supports this benefit is distinct from the Teacher Pension Fund and is currently overfunded, demonstrating both its fiscal strength and sustainability.

Senate Bill 2678 responsibly builds on this strong foundation by increasing the minimum monthly benefit while maintaining the fund's long-term solvency. Even with the proposed increase, the fund is expected to remain overfunded, ensuring that this enhancement is both prudent and sustainable.

Additionally, the bill provides for annual cost-of-living adjustments tied to the Social Security COLA. This is a particularly important provision, as it establishes a fair and predictable mechanism to ensure that benefits keep pace with inflation. By indexing these adjustments to Social Security, the legislation promotes stability and removes the need for repeated legislative action to address rising costs over time.

At a time when many are struggling with the increasing cost of living, this bill offers a dignified and responsible way to support the surviving spouses and partners of retired educators. These individuals often rely on fixed incomes, and modest improvements to survivor benefits can make a meaningful difference in their financial security and quality of life.

S 2678 does not create a new system or impose new burdens; rather, it strengthens an existing, well-funded program that educators themselves have sustained. It honors the commitment made to teachers and their families while maintaining sound fiscal stewardship.

For these reasons, NEARI strongly urges passage of S 2678.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Lucini". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue rectangular highlight behind it.

Alexander Lucini
Government Relations Director, NEARI