

June 9, 2026

Louis P. DiPalma, Chair  
Senate Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island State House, Room 211  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Support SR3368**

Dear Chair DiPalma and Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families, I am writing to express our strong support for Senate Resolution S3368, creating a Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study Rhode Island's Education Funding Formula and Education Finance System.

The Coalition applauds the General Assembly's commitment to conducting a comprehensive review of Rhode Island's education funding formula. Since the formula's adoption in 2010, the needs of students, schools, and communities have evolved significantly. As the resolution correctly notes, school districts are facing growing fiscal pressures driven by rising costs, changing student needs, and increasing demands on educational systems.

We are particularly encouraged that the commission will evaluate the recommendations of the Rhode Island Foundation's Blue Ribbon Commission on Education Funding and consider ways to modernize the state's approach to funding public education.

As you finalize appointments and consider the commission's work, we respectfully urge that professionals with expertise in children's behavioral health and child welfare be included among its members or formally engaged as participating stakeholders. Today, a substantial portion of school district expenditures are directly related to addressing students' behavioral health needs, including school-based mental health services, behavioral interventions, crisis response, specialized supports, and services for students with significant emotional and behavioral challenges.

The need for these services has increased dramatically in recent years. Rhode Island schools are experiencing growing rates of student anxiety, depression, trauma-related conditions, and other behavioral health challenges that affect students' academic success, attendance, and overall well-being. School districts have increasingly become providers and coordinators of behavioral health supports, often filling gaps in the broader children's behavioral health system.

In addition, the commission will need to consider the unique educational needs of children and youth involved in the child welfare system, including those in foster care, kinship care, residential treatment, and other out-of-home placements.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and school districts have specific obligations to promote school stability, continuity of enrollment, transportation, and educational success

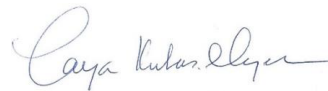
for children in foster care. These students often face significant educational disruptions, behavioral health challenges, and barriers to academic achievement that require coordinated support across education, child welfare, and behavioral health systems.

As the commission evaluates Rhode Island's education finance system, it is important that the voices of child welfare and children's behavioral health professionals are included to help assess whether current funding structures adequately support schools in meeting the needs of these vulnerable students and fulfilling their federal responsibilities.

Given this reality, any meaningful examination of Rhode Island's education funding formula should include the perspectives of professionals who understand the scope, cost, and effectiveness of child welfare and children's behavioral health services. Their expertise would help ensure that the commission fully considers the financial impact of these critical needs on school districts and develops recommendations that accurately reflect the resources necessary to support student success.

The Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families stands ready to assist the commission and policymakers as this important work moves forward. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to supporting efforts to create a more equitable, transparent, and sustainable education funding system for Rhode Island's students.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas Meyer  
Executive Director  
Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families