

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

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Marc B. Parlange, Ph.D., P.Eng.

President



March 12, 2026

The Honorable Walter Felag, Jr.
Rhode Island Senate Committee on Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: S. 2420

Dear Chairman Felag and honorable members of the Committee,

I am writing regarding S. 2420, which would expand state-sponsored tuition waivers for members of the National Guard to their dependents. The University of Rhode Island (URI) philosophically supports this legislation; however, URI currently does not receive the requisite funding from the state to support our current National Guard students.

Currently, 7% of the state's National Guard is enrolled at URI, totaling roughly 200 students. However, the state is not providing the requisite funding to cover the tuition waiver. We are requesting \$800,000 in support of Strategic Initiatives in our FY 27 budget request, which is a portion of the \$3 million currently spent on the program annually.

The University has long been a partner to the Rhode Island National Guard, offering educational opportunities to Guard members through several specialized programs. One such program, the State Tuition Waiver, has been in place since 1978 and allows eligible National Guard members to attend URI tuition-free. This initiative aims to support service members in their educational pursuits, ensuring they can balance their military commitments while pursuing a degree.

The State Tuition Waiver provides full-tuition coverage for members of the Rhode Island National Guard who meet specific eligibility criteria. Currently, URI absorbs the costs of the waivers, which have been growing in recent years. This program has proven to be invaluable for service members seeking to advance their education without the financial burden of tuition costs. Many Guard members have successfully earned degrees from URI in fields ranging from business and engineering to health and education, significantly enhancing their professional and military careers and benefiting the state of Rhode Island.

While URI philosophically supports our National Guard program and has done so for many years, this legislation would create an expanded unfunded mandate for the University.

Kind regards,


Marc B. Parlange, Ph.D., P.Eng.
President