

April 30, 2024

Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair
House Committee on Finance

RE: H7036 - An Act Relating to Education - The Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Caleigh Rockwal and I am a Social Studies Learning Facilitator at 360 High School and a resident of Providence, Rhode Island. I am writing today as a citizen to express my support of the passage of Bill H7036.

I have officially been a Social Studies teacher for five years, but for four years prior I also served as a college student mentor and advocacy coach in several Providence public schools through Generation Citizen. Across these nine years of work, I have facilitated many action civics projects like the ones now required by the Civic Literacy Act. These projects are meaningful, engaging, and culturally-relevant, and they show us what we already know about our students: that they are passionate critical-thinkers who are committed to bettering their worlds.

I feel lucky to feel supported in this work. My administrators are strong advocates for my civics classes. Unfortunately, data from the State of Civics report shows that my experience is unique. Only 21% of administrators surveyed said that their district even offers a civics course, and only 10% said that they saw civics as a current priority. Districts and school buildings are not prioritizing civics education, despite the mandate from the Civic Literacy Act to do so.

Teachers are feeling the impacts of this lack of investment directly. 55% of Rhode Island teachers said that they don't have access to civic-related professional development, and the majority of Rhode Island teachers don't have access to a civics curriculum. This is disappointing, especially considering that 95% of teachers believe that they can teach civics effectively. Social Studies educators are ready and willing to implement high-quality civics education like the projects I described, but they need adequate support to be able to do so.

56% of my students are multilingual learners who are coming to Rhode Island from countries across the globe. My civics class is their opportunity to learn about, grapple with, and engage in the American democratic process. It is critical that every classroom like mine across the state has an educator who is equipped to guide them on this journey. Funding civics education through the passage of this bill is one important step towards this goal, and I urge the Finance Committee to take action now to support this priority.

Sincerely,



Caleigh Rockwal
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