

Chris O'Brien

From: Kristina Pires <kpires@generationcitizen.org>
Sent: Tuesday, April 30, 2024 3:00 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: H7036 - In Favor

House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

May 30, 2024

Re: Testimony in Support of House 7036: An Act Related to Education - The Education Equity & Property Tax Relief Act

Dear Chair Abney and honorable members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Kristina Pires and I am the Executive Director of Generation Citizen New England a leading national civics education nonprofit originally founded here in Providence in 2010. Currently, Generation Citizen is working with over 5,500 students in Rhode Island in 7 districts. For the past 14+ years, Generation Citizen has been working to transform our democracy by equipping and inspiring young people to engage civically in their local communities. We do this by providing a hands-on project-based civics curriculum and training and coaching teachers to implement this curriculum. This year, we are working with 75 teachers in Rhode Island.

Additionally, Generation Citizen helped to found the RI Civic Learning Coalition in 2020 that now includes 14 active organizations, students and teachers. In 2021 we supported the passage of the Civics Literacy Act.

It is our extensive work in RI and across the country that has me here today in support of 7036 so that we can fund the unfunded mandate of the Civics Literacy Act.

This committee has an opportunity to ensure RI leads the country in delivering a high quality civic learning experience for our future leaders. When we say high quality, we are speaking beyond the rote memorization of historical facts and more towards the applied action and repetition of civic skills that are necessary for continued civic engagement. Just as they do in science courses when they take science labs, our young people need hands-on experiential civics, one that provides them with tools like, research, leading others, communication skills, media literacy skills, discourse across different “ also all skills necessary for career and college.

In 2022 we worked with the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement out of Tufts University to design and execute the first State of Civics Education in RI study. Our results came from educators and administrators in 30 districts and students in 28 districts across the state and found several key insights that I want to share with you today:

1. While the Civics Literacy Act exists, more than a third of respondents do not feel their school or district supports high-quality civics education and it has not been prioritized.
2. Teachers are ready and eager to engage in this work with their students, but more than half indicated they do not have access to civics professional development and they cited their civics curricular resources as being outdated or not having any at all.
3. There are deep inequities in access to civics learning across lines of race/ethnicity, parent education level, language spoken at home, and socioeconomic status. These inequities in RI are perpetuating the civic engagement gap for our most vulnerable population resulting in lack of representation and policies that continue to prioritize and privilege some groups over others.

What this bill, 7036, will do is ensure RI schools have the resources they need to be successful by dedication funding for:

- Teacher professional development
- Civics curricular resources
- Evaluation and assessment
- Oversight from RIDE

It will also ensure that our highest need communities receive the highest percentage of the funds to address the inequities across the state.

I urge you to urgently move this bill to a vote in favor of bill 7036.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of bill 7036. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Kristina Pires
Executive Director
Generation Citizen New England

Sent from my iPhone