



50 Vailey Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02909  
(401) 444-0600 | www.unitedwayri.org



April 30, 2024  
Honorable Marvin Abney, Chair  
Committee on House Finance  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill Numbers 7397, 7545, 7906 – RELATING TO EDUCATION – The Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act & Certification of Teachers**

As a member of the world’s largest nonprofit network, United Way of Rhode Island is proud to bring together individuals, businesses, nonprofit, community leaders and government to tackle the root causes of inequity and achieve specific, measurable goals. We are aware of the nationwide teacher shortage that is currently hindering k-12 education throughout the state; according to the latest Rhode Island Kids Count policy brief, Racial and Ethnic Disparities in K-16 Education in Rhode Island, our state not only lacks an efficient number of public-school teachers, social workers, and other student emotional support staff, we also struggle to recruit and retain diverse cohorts of educators that positively reflect the demographics of the public student population (KidsCount, 2023). United Way of Rhode Island is in strong support of House Bills 7397, 7545 and 7906, and the initiatives to provide schools additional funding to increase the number of licensed social workers to support student mental health supports and improve the certification processes for educators.

We recommend the creation of a strong pre-k, and k-12 educator cohort that is diverse and affirms the identity of BIPOC, Latinx, and South East Asian educators. A strong educator cohort that recruits and retains diverse educators will require an increase in financial support and compensation, career professional development opportunities and other enhanced learning supports for adult learners. Young people and their schools have been caught up in the movement that highlights but does not address racial disparities, which increasingly prioritizes control and compliance in Black and Brown schools, instead of educational opportunity. The Rhode Island Kids Count policy brief, Racial and Ethnic Disparities in K-16 Education in Rhode Island confirms that a comprehensive strategy to recruit and retain diverse quality educators will work in tandem to achieve the expected youth academic goals and increase the financial compensation abilities of educators who provide crucial comprehensive support to our youth. (KidsCount, 2023)

**Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.**





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An increase in diverse educators, social workers, and other student support professionals will support improved educational outcomes for youth and increase the opportunities for young professionals to socially and professionally develop and allow them to upwardly mobilize through access to higher education and extending career opportunities. These changes give educators and their families a shot at breaking the cycle of poverty and access to education and training that not only create a pathway to individual long-term security but also contribute to the economy and fill the gaps in the under engaged education workforce industry.

All of our state's children deserve opportunities to learn in high-quality public education classrooms staffed by exemplary teachers trained to meet individualized learning needs. United Way of Rhode Island respectfully requests your support for House Bills 7397, 7545 and 7906, the Education Property Tax Relief Act and the Certification of Teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely Yours,  
Elijah McLean  
United Way of Rhode Island

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