



Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education
Organizational Testimony in Support of House Bill #7545
Apr 30, 2024

ARISE stands in full support of House Bill 7545, which mandates a full-time certified school social worker for every 250 students in every Rhode Island school.

The urgency for this bill is highlighted by compelling statistics that underline the mental health challenges facing our student population. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in six U.S. youth aged 6-17 experiences a mental health disorder annually. With 50% of all lifetime mental illnesses beginning by age 14 and 75% by age 24, early and adequate intervention in our schools is more crucial than ever.

Rhode Island's current situation further emphasizes the need for this bill. Data from the American School Counselor Association for the 2022-2023 school year shows that Rhode Island has one counselor for every 374 students—the highest ratio in New England. This statistic starkly contrasts with the recommended ratio of 250:1, underscoring a significant gap in the mental health support available to our students. This gap can lead to increased mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, which severely impact educational and social development.

Schools that provide adequate mental health resources see notable improvements in several areas. These include decreased absenteeism, enhanced academic performance, and a more supportive school environment.

We strongly advocate for the passage of HB 7545 as a necessary step towards addressing the mental health crisis in our schools. By ensuring sufficient access to professional social workers, we can significantly improve the educational landscape and the overall mental health of our students.

Thank you for considering this critical issue. We look forward to the passage of this bill and the positive changes it will bring to the educational system in Rhode Island.