

Dear House Committee on Finance,

Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony in support of house bill 7545.

My name is Chelsea Frade and I am testifying today as a lifelong Rhode Island resident, an advocate for children, and a future social worker. I urge you to support House bill 7545. This bill is pivotal to ensuring schools have enough social workers to help students receive the resources they so desperately need.

I am a behavior specialist who works with students of all grades and in many different districts across the state. One thing, regardless of demographics or location, which all of Rhode Island's students have in common is they are struggling. I work with the most vulnerable of students and there are countless instances of emotional or physical crisis situations and the school social worker is not in the building, overloaded with other students, or simply nonexistent due to staff shortage.

Recently there was a crucially needed threat assessment for an elementary school aged student and we had to wait over an hour for the social worker to come from another building in the district. Our students deserve access to social workers when they need them. Additionally, many students have it written into IEP plans, so it is illegal to not provide access to adequate social workers.

The National Association of Social Workers recommends a ratio of one social worker for every 250 students. Access to school social workers is imperative to the success of students in school. Having an appropriate social worker-to-student ratio allows teachers to focus on educating students and affords students the opportunity to get proper attention to their needs: academically, socially, and emotionally.

Social workers bring extensive, multifaceted skills to schools and help address complex student and family needs, as well as respond to crises that impact both the school and community. School social workers help to maintain a safe and supportive environment and they offer critically needed mental health support.

For all of these reasons, I am in strong support of Bill 7545! It is a critical first step to helping our very much struggling students. I urge the passage of this bill as soon as possible. Social workers save lives. Our children need them. Our future depends on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Chelsea Frade

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