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May 8, 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney  
Chairman, House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: In Support of HB7905 – An Act Relating to State Affairs & Government- Tuition Waiver Pilot Program For Children In Foster Care**

Dear Chairman Abney:

I am writing to express my support for HB7905 - An Act Relating To State Affairs & Government - Tuition Waiver Pilot Program For Children In Foster Care. This bill would allow students who were in the custody of the Rhode Island Department of Children Youth & Families through their Foster Care Program for a period of time between the ages of 14 and 21, to attend Rhode Island College with a waiver of mandatory fees and tuition so long as they remain on track to graduate in four years among other eligibility requirements.

Children in Rhode Island's Foster Care System rarely have the family or financial support to seek a higher education. During their time in foster care, the state invests resources in these individuals to support their needs in a number of areas. Oftentimes, children aging out of foster care face challenging barriers to postsecondary attainment that others do not. This tuition waiver program would be a different type of investment that would provide an opportunity for these students to take a new and exciting path to overcome these challenges and achieve educational and employment success. This is truly a wonderful outcome for students who could easily be left behind. Instead, as a result of this pilot program, foster kids can become productive members of Rhode Island's workforce helping to strengthen themselves and our economy.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to work with you to improve our state through postsecondary education and encourage the committee to support this bill.

Respectfully,

Shannon Gilkey, Ed.D.  
Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance  
The Honorable Julie Casimiro  
Ms. Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House