

Dear Chairman Abney and the House Finance Committee,

My name is Slade Sharma. I am 27 years old and I am a former recipient of funding provided to foster care students enrolling at Rhode Island College. I am writing in strong support of Bill #7905.

As a 13 year old child in Rhode Island, I was emancipated from my maternal parent's care and was given up to the foster care system. I was determined to carve out a life for myself despite my situation at an early age. I had goals of attending college and entering a career that would leave a positive impact on others. I write to you today as a Rhode Island College graduate (Undergraduate degree in History) and a graduate from Providence College (Master's Degree in Urban Education) and as an MLL teacher at East Providence High School. My goals and dreams of pursuing this career would not at all be possible if not for funds allotted by the state for me to attend Rhode Island College.

As a foster care child, I know firsthand how difficult it is to pursue a life that you can feel comfortable in. Over the years of pursuing a life I could be proud of, those close to me who know my story have told me how "remarkable" it is to have achieved what I have done academically, professionally, and personally. I have never truly seen it as "remarkable." In my mind, I have always seen my accomplishments as necessary steps for the goals I have in my life. I understood my deficits and the metaphorical hand that life had dealt me, and I knew I had to work very hard to overcome those odds. The funding provided to Rhode Island College to allow financial assistance to children in foster care is what gave a child like me hope. It made it easier on my end to realize that if I work hard, my beloved home state would look out for me. It allowed me to see that if I wanted to pursue a higher education, I could without a significant financial burden, obtain my Master's degree at Providence College shortly after receiving my Bachelors degree, in large part because of my low cost of tuition at Rhode Island College. In such a competitive career field, I am happy I was able to pursue my Master's degree to improve myself as a professional and make myself stand out as a candidate. This would not have been an option if my undergraduate cost to attend Rhode Island College was too high.

I am so grateful to have been aided by funding. When I heard about Bill #7905, I knew that I had to testify on its behalf. It's so important that more kids like myself maintain hope that pursuing higher education is possible. I urge the House Finance Committee to strongly consider the passage of Bill #7905 in order to increase the number of youths in foster care who can enroll in and expeditiously obtain degrees from Rhode Island College.

Thank you for your time,
Slade Sharma
Former Foster Care Child