



March 18, 2025

**The Honorable, Evan P. Shanley, Chair**  
**House State Government & Elections Committee**  
**Rhode Island Statehouse**  
**Providence 02903**

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 5382- An Act Relating to Elections – General Provisions**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our support for House Bill No. 5382, which advances civic engagement and youth empowerment within our education system. Through the ACHIEVE UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we are committed to ensuring that every young person has access not only to high-quality education, but also to meaningful opportunities to participate in shaping the policies that affect their schools and futures.

House Bill No. 5382 is a critical step in supporting student voice and fostering early civic participation by allowing 16- and 17-year-old residents to vote in school committee elections in municipalities where school committees are elected. This bill ensures that students—those most directly impacted by school governance—can contribute to decisions about educational policy, representation, and learning environments.

States and municipalities across the country, including Takoma Park, Maryland, and Berkeley, California, have implemented similar reforms, showing strong youth turnout and long-term civic engagement. Research from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) finds that early voting experience is one of the strongest predictors of future participation, helping to build habits of engaged and informed citizenship.

Strengthening civic engagement among youth is an investment in Rhode Island's future.

House Bill No. 5382 helps ensure that young people—especially those in historically underrepresented communities—have a voice in shaping the institutions that serve them. By supporting this legislation, we lay the foundation for a more equitable, participatory, and informed democracy. We respectfully urge your support for this bill as a step toward building a more engaged and empowered next

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generation of Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

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