

2026 -- H 7811

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LC005191
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

JOINT RESOLUTION

MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$500,000 TO ONWARD WE LEARN IN SUPPORT OF
RHODE ISLAND GEAR UP

Introduced By: Representatives Biah, O'Brien, Phillips, Slater, Furtado, Alzate, Stewart,
McNamara, Boylan, and Speakman

Date Introduced: February 12, 2026

Referred To: House Finance

1 WHEREAS, Prior legislative findings in Chapter 70 of title 16 of the Rhode Island
2 General Laws outline the need for Rhode Island to invest in college access and success programs
3 that develop the educational and career and technical skills of its students for its continued
4 economic development, prosperity, and for maintaining and improving its quality of life; and

5 WHEREAS, The present and future workforce requires ever higher levels of educational
6 and career and technical training in order to improve the economic prosperity of our State and
7 Nation; and the cost is a known barrier for all young people in Rhode Island to access higher
8 education; and

9 WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is the
10 recipient of the Rhode Island GEAR UP grant from the U.S. Department of Education and
11 partners with Onward We Learn to design and deliver all programmatic and scholarship
12 operations in conjunction with the Rhode Island GEAR UP program; and

13 WHEREAS, Onward We Learn's mission is to inspire and prepare young people in
14 Rhode Island to become the first in their families to attend and complete college by participating
15 in a comprehensive set of programs throughout middle school and high school that focus on
16 academic enrichment, social and emotional development, career education, and post-secondary
17 preparation; and

18 WHEREAS, Independent research completed over the past seventeen (17) years confirms
19 that students who participate in Onward We Learn are forty-eight percent (48%) more likely to

1 earn a college degree compared to their closely matched peers; and

2 WHEREAS, Onward We Learn students not only receive comprehensive college access
3 and success programming through the Rhode Island GEAR UP program, but also a scholarship
4 for postsecondary education of up to four thousand five hundred dollars (\$4,500) per year for four
5 (4) years which can be redeemed at any institution of higher education in Rhode Island; and

6 WHEREAS, Since its inception, Onward We Learn – via the Rhode Island GEAR UP
7 program – has provided more than fifty-five million dollars (\$55,000,000) in scholarships to an
8 estimated thirteen thousand five hundred (13,500) young people in Rhode Island – increasing the
9 likelihood of degree attainment, while reducing each student’s overall higher education cost
10 burden; and

11 WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Office of Postsecondary Commissioner received a seven
12 (7) year federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 2024 and has sub-granted the
13 funds to Onward We Learn; and

14 WHEREAS, The Rhode Island GEAR UP grant has a dollar-for-dollar non-federal match
15 requirement and Rhode Island General Law § 16-70-5 states that “the general assembly shall
16 annually appropriate such sums as it deems necessary as the state’s share for the support and
17 maintenance of Onward We Learn”; now, therefore be it

18 RESOLVED, That there is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the treasury not
19 otherwise appropriated for the fiscal year 2026-2027, the sum of five hundred thousand dollars
20 (\$500,000) to Onward We Learn in support of the Rhode Island GEAR UP operations and
21 scholarship program; and the state controller is hereby authorized and directed to draw their
22 orders upon the general treasurer for payment of said sum, or so much thereof as may be from
23 time to time required, upon receipt of properly authenticated vouchers.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

J O I N T R E S O L U T I O N

MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$500,000 TO ONWARD WE LEARN IN SUPPORT OF
RHODE ISLAND GEAR UP

- 1 This resolution would appropriate the sum of \$500,000 to Onward We Learn in support
2 of Rhode Island GEAR UP.

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