

2026 -- S 3216

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LC006326  
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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JOINT RESOLUTION

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

Introduced By: Senators Gallo, DiPalma, Tikoian, Ciccone, LaMountain, Felag, Burke,  
and Gu

Date Introduced: April 14, 2026

Referred To: Senate 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

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- 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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