

**2026 -- H 7501**

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**S T A T E   O F   R H O D E   I S L A N D**

**IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026**

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**A N   A C T**

**RELATING TO EDUCATION -- BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME**

Introduced By: Representatives Shallcross Smith, Fogarty, Slater, Bennett, Azzinaro, and DeSimone

Date Introduced: February 04, 2026

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1        **SECTION 1. Findings of Fact and Purpose.**

2        The purpose of this chapter is to support the mental health and emotional well-being of  
3        children and youth through investments in out-of-school time (“OST”) settings, recognizing OST  
4        programs as essential, community-based spaces that provide connection, stability, and resilience  
5        during a period of heightened need and reduced public supports.

6        Rhode Island continues to experience significant mental health challenges among children  
7        and adolescents that affect well-being, school engagement, family stability, and long-term  
8        outcomes. In April 2022, leading pediatric and behavioral health organizations in the state declared  
9        a Rhode Island State of Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health. These challenges have  
10      been compounded by reductions in federal funding for schools and student support services,  
11      increasing pressure on local and community-based systems to meet growing needs with fewer  
12      resources.

13        Out-of-school time programs offer trusted, relationship-based environments where youth  
14      spend substantial time outside of the school day. These programs are embedded within the  
15      communities they serve and frequently employ staff, mentors, and leaders who reflect the lived  
16      experiences, cultures, and strengths of local families. Through intentional program design, OST  
17      programs function as intergenerational systems of support that foster belonging, strengthen  
18      protective factors, and support prevention, early identification of need, and connection to  
19      appropriate supports.

1 Investments made pursuant to this chapter strengthen the capacity of existing OST  
2 programs to serve as stabilizing and supportive spaces for youth, mitigate the impacts of reduced  
3 school-day and federally funded supports, and reinforce community-based systems that are built  
4 by and for the communities they serve.

5 SECTION 2. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by  
6 adding thereto the following chapter:

## CHAPTER 117

## BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

**16-117-1. Short title.**

10        This chapter shall be known and may be cited as "Building Opportunities in Out-of-School  
11        Time".

### **16-117-2. Eligibility and allowable use.**

13        (a) Funds appropriated under this chapter shall support evidence-informed initiatives that  
14        promote the mental health and emotional well-being of children and youth through community-  
15        based or school-affiliated out-of-school time (“OST”) programs serving students in kindergarten  
16        through grade twelve (K-12).

18 (1) Mental health first aid training, trauma-informed practices, or related learning  
19 opportunities for OST staff, youth leaders, volunteers, caregivers, or program partners;

20 (2) Peer support groups, mentoring models, restorative practices, or youth-led initiatives  
21 that foster connection, belonging, and emotional well-being;

22 (3) Development, purchase, or implementation of materials, curricula, or resources that  
23 support mental health awareness, social-emotional learning, coping skills, and resilience;

24 (4) Program-based mental health projects, workshops, enrichment activities, or creative  
25 expressions that integrate wellness and prevention into QST programming; and

26 (5) Other innovative, community-informed, or culturally responsive approaches designed  
27 to support youth mental health, prevention, early identification of need, and connection to  
28 appropriate supports.

29        (c) Funds shall be used in a manner that allows OST programs to respond flexibly to local  
30        needs and priorities, while promoting developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and supportive  
31        practices for youth and families.

### **16-117-3. Funding and allocation.**

33 (a) The general assembly shall allocate one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) in the  
34 fiscal year 2026–2027 budget to carry out the purposes of this chapter.

1           (b) Funds shall be administered by the appropriate state agency or by a designated  
2        statewide intermediary, ideally the Rhode Island Afterschool Network, with demonstrated expertise  
3        in out-of-school time systems, youth development, and equitable grantmaking. The administering  
4        entity shall award funds through a competitive process to qualified OST programs, prioritize  
5        programs serving youth with high levels of demonstrated need, ensure distribution across multiple  
6        programs, and consider geographic diversity, including urban, suburban, and rural communities.

7           **16-117-4. Reporting.**

8           The administering agency or intermediary shall submit a brief annual report to the general  
9        assembly detailing the number of OST programs and youth served, the geographic distribution of  
10       funded programs, and a summary of funded activities and observed outcomes.

11           SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

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- 1        This act would provide one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) in the fiscal year 2026–
- 2        2027 budget to support the mental health and emotional well-being of children and youth through
- 3        investments in out-of-school time (“OST”) settings, as essential, community-based spaces that
- 4        provide connection, stability, and resilience during a period of heightened need and reduced public
- 5        supports.
- 6        This act would take effect upon passage.

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