

Christien Laible
RI House District 8
Providence, RI 02909

March 13, 2024

Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 7726 on School Closures

Dear members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Christien Laible and I am a resident of Providence. I am a former school teacher and a current Master's Student in the Urban Education Policy program at Brown University. I am writing to express my support for House Bill No. 7726 on "Standards for closure or phase-out of a public school building." I urge you to support this bill to increase the accountability of state and local leaders when making such consequential decisions.

First, I am deeply concerned about the lack of student, family, and community engagement that I have seen with regard to the recent public school closures in Providence. The mishandling of the announced closures of two elementary schools in 2023 was extremely unfortunate and led to further distrust from the community, but there was hope that the district would learn from its mistakes. Now, after seeing the way that PPSD decided to communicate the consolidation of 360 High School, it is evident that there needs to be more accountability in these situations. House Bill 7726 will ensure that future closures follow a streamlined, transparent process, that is grounded in data-driven decision-making and community engagement. This includes listening to the voices of those most impacted by closures: students, staff, families, and community members. Community engagement is essential to help rebuild trust and improve academic and life outcomes for all students.

Second, school closures in this country disproportionately impact low-income, communities of color and further marginalize those who have historically been excluded from receiving an excellent public education. Rhode Island is actually behind other states in terms of protecting student and family rights when it comes to school closures. For example, California mandates that a district conduct an "equity impact assessment" and engage the community before closing a school.¹ Colorado has a "Closure Pathway Plan Rubric" to ensure that districts are meeting basic expectations for good decision-making and community engagement.² These are just two examples of ensuring that the serious process of closing a school has necessary checks and balances.

In short, declining enrollments across the state may necessitate future school closures. That is why there must be an equitable and transparent process that engages the community before a final decision to close a school is made. Please vote to pass House Bill 7726.

Thank you.

¹ <https://ed.stanford.edu/news/majority-black-schools-outpace-others-school-closures-nationwide-stanford-analysis-shows>

² <https://www.cde.state.co.us/accountability/closureplan>