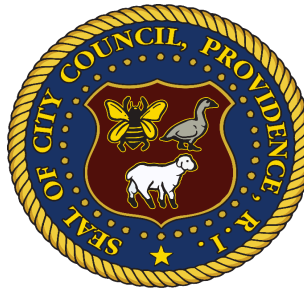


Shelley T. Peterson, MPA
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COMMITTEES

State Legislative Affairs

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Claims and Pending Suits

March 13, 2023

House Education Committee
Rhode Island State General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H-7726 Support Letter

Dear Committee Members:

Members of the Committee thank you for the opportunity to express my strong support for the proposed house bill 7726 regarding the closure, phase-out, and merger of public schools in our state. As a Councilor for the city of Providence, a concerned constituent and staunch advocate for educational equity, I believe that this bill is a crucial step towards ensuring transparency, accountability, and community engagement in decisions affecting our public school systems.

The Providence Public School system has faced significant challenges in recent years, marked by persistently low academic performance and systemic issues that have hindered student success. Despite ongoing efforts to address these issues, including state intervention, increased funding and facilities renovations, student achievement metrics such as standardized test scores and graduation rates remain below state and national averages. These metrics are often utilized as the measurables for school closure decisions. Unfortunately, once these decisions are made, the outcome is exacerbated by outcries of lack of a transparent process that includes the communities affected. The need for comprehensive reforms and targeted interventions to improve educational outcomes and ensure equitable access to quality education for all students in Providence is paramount. Simply put, we need to do better. As an elected official, it is essential that we promote opportunities for accountability so that we are no longer left searching for answers alongside parents who are struggling to figure out next steps. As a constituent and a parent, I would be remiss if I wasn't constantly concerned about the outcome for families who cannot navigate this arduous system—intentionally designed to keep them out of the decision making process. Ultimately the outcome is consistently the same—we are failing our students.

This bill outlines a comprehensive process that mandates public school districts and the department of elementary and secondary education to adhere to specific procedures when considering the closure, phase-out, or merger of a public school. This includes announcing proposals, providing detailed reports on facility conditions and enrollment trends, and

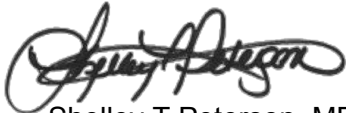
developing contingency transition plans for students, families, and staff affected by these decisions.

One of the most significant aspects of the bill is the requirement for public engagement and community input throughout the decision-making process. It mandates that the powers that be hold multiple meetings and forums with stakeholders, including staff, students, families, and community members, to share information, gather feedback, and address concerns regarding proposed closures or mergers. This ensures that the voices of those directly impacted by these decisions are heard and considered before any final determinations are made.

Furthermore, the bill prioritizes transparency by mandating the release of detailed reports and contingency plans to the public, providing insight into the rationale behind proposed closures or mergers and the strategies in place to support affected individuals during transitions. This transparency fosters trust and accountability within our public school system and empowers communities to actively participate in shaping the future of their schools.

In conclusion, I urge you to support and advocate for the passage of this bill, as it represents a crucial step towards promoting fairness, inclusivity, and community involvement in decisions impacting our public schools. By implementing transparent and inclusive processes for school closures, phase-outs, and mergers, we can ensure that all stakeholders have a voice in shaping the educational landscape of our community.

In Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shelley T. Peterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Shelley T Peterson, MPA
Providence City Council, Ward 14