



To: House Committee on Education
From: Erich Haslehurst, National Education Association Rhode Island
Date: March 4, 2025
Re: H5338 – RELATING TO EDUCATION -- HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PUPILS

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the Education Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the National Education Association Rhode Island and our 12,000 members to express our support of H5338, introduced by Representative Casimiro.

This year, student health and wellbeing is a top priority of NEARI's legislative agenda. We are working with parents, allies, and lawmakers to tackle the root causes that hinder learning, engagement, and meaningful social interactions in safe, welcoming public schools.

As we have testified recently, and as you all know, there is a student behavioral and mental health crisis, and it is having a significant impact on education in our K-12 schools.

Here are just a few statistics where a majority of our preK-12 educators report the following:

- 74% -- see an increase in students acting out
- 74% -- say students are having trouble concentrating
- 63% -- see an increase in absenteeism

In fact, classroom teachers report losing a median of five hours of instruction time each month due to disruptive student behavior. This is a very clear problem.

When we polled our members on these issues, they overwhelmingly said they want clearer district policies, more resources, more support from administration, and a voice at the table when creating district policies. Our teachers and support staff have very real issues with morale due to student behavioral and mental health issues which discourage people from wanting to enter the profession.

We need to work toward meaningful solutions and requiring a ratio of one psychologist for every 500 students is something that helps to change the system to better serve the mental health of our student population.

Sincerely,

Erich Haslehurst
National Education Association Rhode Island