



RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT AFL-CIO

To: House Education Committee

From: Maribeth Calabro, President

Date: April 22, 2025

Re: **School District Takeover Restriction**

Testimony in **support** of H 5594 (Representative DeSimone, et. al.)

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) supports H 5594, legislation that places a critical safeguard on the state's authority to take over public schools. Specifically, this bill ensures that the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) may exercise full, intensive intervention authority—control over budget, staffing, and academic programming—in only one school, within one district, at a time.

The state's ongoing takeover of the Providence Public School District (PPSD), launched in 2019, has not delivered the results it promised. The district remains beset by instability and deep community frustration. Rather than invest in local capacity or support the expertise of Providence educators, the state spent millions of dollars on outside consultants with little accountability and limited connection to the community.

This intervention has not empowered students or educators, rather it has served to further disenfranchise them. Families, teachers, and the School Board report that they have been consistently disregarded by the very leaders charged with "turning the district around." Although the intent of the Takeover was to serve as an improvement effort for our struggling schools, it has had the opposite effect by diminishing transparency, undermining trust, and diverting much needed resources away from meaningful, student-centered change.

This is consistent with the findings of Dr. Domingo Morel, whose research shows that state takeovers disproportionately target communities of color and often erode democratic participation. In his words, "State takeovers rarely lead to academic improvement, but they do succeed in removing the political power of Black and Latino communities." The current state takeover has exacerbated inequity rather than resolved it.

H 5594 does not prevent the state from providing broad assistance or oversight across multiple schools and districts. But when it comes to the most invasive level of control—when RIDE assumes direct operational authority over a school—this bill ensures that such intervention is limited, focused, and manageable. Limiting full state control to one school at a time allows for more deliberate planning, deeper engagement, and better outcomes.

Most importantly, this bill will prevent other communities from having to endure a full-district takeover, which has not lived up to its promises, as it has not in Providence. No school system should be subjected to a top-down takeover without guardrails, and unchecked authority. Rhode Island needs research-based intervention strategies that are student-centered, which prioritize collaboration, build sustainable systems and structures that elevate the instructional practices of educators, increase student's opportunities to learn and thrive and respect the lived experience of those working and learning in our schools every day.

By passing H 5594, Rhode Island takes a necessary step to prevent future harm, restore public confidence, and chart a smarter, more effective path forward for school improvement.

We urge the House Education Committee to support this legislation and ensure that the state's resources are used responsibly, transparently, and with clear limits.

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