



To: House Committee on Education

From: Erich Haslehurst, National Education Association Rhode Island

Date: May 6, 2025

Re: H6271 – RELATING TO EDUCATION – STUDENT ACCESS TO INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS, "THE VERA RILEY ACT"

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 strong opposition to House Bill 6271, introduced by Representative Slater, for several reasons.

This bill permits students attending private and charter schools to participate in extracurricular athletic activities in the public school district in which they reside, provided their own school does not offer that activity. While that may appear fair on its face, this bill further shifts the burden—logistically and financially—onto public school systems, without offering reciprocity, compensation, or structural safeguards.

Public schools already support private and charter school students in multiple ways. We transport them. We supply textbooks. We absorb the loss in per-pupil funding when those students opt out of our public systems. Now, we're being asked to provide athletic opportunities, while our own students often compete for limited roster spots, field time, and resources.

Further, this bill does not offer reciprocity. For example, if Classical High School were to lose its football program—would a student there be able to play at La Salle Academy? The answer is no. Yet this legislation asks us to open our facilities and programs to students from institutions that do not extend the same courtesy to ours.

This bill could also exacerbate inequities. Private and charter schools often have greater flexibility in who they admit and what they fund. Public schools, by contrast, are open to all and accountable to everyone. Requiring public schools to supplement programs for institutions that do not face these same requirements adds to an already uneven playing field. And who pays? We all do. Our local taxpayers. Our athletic directors and coaches. Our students—who may now be competing with peers from other institutions for limited spots on a team.

For these reasons, we urge you to reject H6271 and instead focus on legislation that strengthens our public schools rather than asking them to continue to do more with less.

For these reasons, NEARI strongly opposes this legislation.

Sincerely,

Erich Haslehurst  
National Education Association Rhode Island