

Testimony of Warren Heyman, Organizing Director, Rhode Island School Recycling Project
Bill number House Bill No. 7342 entitled, An Act relating to education—School Waste and refuse disposal

February 10, 2026

My name is Warren Heyman and I am the Organizing Director of the Rhode Island School Recycling Project.

We are a non-profit funded with grants from the Rhode Island Foundation and 11th Hour Racing, a private Foundation.

Our project is focused on helping school district implement the Food Waste Diversion law that House Bill No. 7342 is addressing. I am testifying in support of the proposed amendments to the law. The House passed this amended law in the last session.

As of today, we have set-up food waste recovery and diversion programs in 73 schools.

As you know the Johnston Landfill will be full by 2046 and then we will have to pay millions of dollars to ship our trash out of state just like Conn.

Our schools send 2500 tons of food waste to the landfill each year. Of that 388 tons is perfectly good, edible and healthy food....unopened milks, unpeeled bananas, oranges and apples, un-opened bags of carrots and yogurts. So we are throwing this good food into the trash while 35% to 40 % of the students in our schools are food insecure.

Our project has diverted over 581 tons of food waste from our landfill and redirected 65 tons of perfectly healthy, edible food to food insecure students.

But there are many districts still not in compliance with the law. All of the healthy, edible food in those towns is going from the kitchen to the students' trays to the trash and then to continue to fill up our landfill. One third of those students still go hunger.

And some of the food service companies are also not in compliance.

We reduce the amount of trash going to the dumpsters behind the schools by over 65%.

North Providence will be able to reduce the number of pick-ups per school from 2 per week to one per week. That savings will cover the cost of this project in North Providence.

And redirect good, healthy, edible food to students who are hungry. WIN WIN

Being in 73 schools thus far has allowed us to train over 4,000 students to be rangers and warriors. This has expanded their knowledge and allowed them to learn leadership skills and gain confidence.

But the law needs to be strengthened. The Districts and their sub-contractors know the law is not enforced by RIDE, the DEM or anyone else. The only reason that the law is being followed in 73 schools is because we are talking with front line principals and Superintendents. If we had not stepped into the breach NOTHING WOULD BE HAPPENING EXCEPT WE WOULD CONTINUE TO THROW 388 TONS OF PERFECTLY GOOD HEALTHY FOOD INTO THE TRASH WHILE STUDENTS GO HUNGRY.

The law needs teeth. The proposed changes are baby teeth.

I understand that RIDE has problems with the proposed changes and want to address those now;

1. It's a burden on the school Districts to submit a written report on compliance to RIDE and for RIDE to post that on the RIDE website.
2. It's unfair that the food service companies BE in compliance with the law in order to bid on additional school districts. This is standard operating procedure for Federal contracts.
3. It's unfair to fine a food service company \$1,000 for not filing a report with RIDE detailing the food they donate to Food Pantries and the tax breaks they utilize. Doesn't seem fair to me to ask them to notify RIDE about their compliance the the tax breaks they get.

Thank you for letting me comment on this legislation