



RHODE ISLAND  
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND  
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS <sup>AFT</sup><sub>AFL - CIO</sub>

To: House Education Committee  
From: Maribeth Calabro, President  
Date: March 10, 2026  
Re: **Establishment of Charter Public Schools**  
Testimony in **Support** of 2026-H7415 (Messier, et al.)

*Maribeth K. Calabro*

Chair, members of the committee,

My name is Maribeth Calabro, president of RIFTHP and I am speaking on behalf of the 12,000 Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals members in strong support of House Bill 7415, which would place a moratorium on the approval or expansion of charter schools and a charter cap similar to what has been done by our neighbors in Massachusetts.

This bill is not about eliminating charter schools. It is about pausing the rapid expansion of a parallel system that is destabilizing the public schools that serve most Rhode Island's children.

Rhode Island already has more than 10,000 students attending charter schools, and in our urban communities the numbers are staggering. Nearly 28 percent of students in Providence (\$11 million dollar deficit for school department) attend charter or state schools. In Pawtucket (\$10 million dollar deficit for school department) it is more than 22 percent, and in Central Falls (close to \$3 million in a state funded district) more than 40 percent.

When students leave district schools for charters, all the per pupil leaves with them. But the costs do not. School districts must still maintain buildings, run buses, and provide high-cost special education services for the students who remain. That creates structural budget gaps that local communities are continuously struggling to close

At the same time, Rhode Island school districts are facing serious financial strains Programs are being cut, positions are being eliminated, and communities are being asked to do more with less, while billionaire-backed charters and "Big-Box" charters have the luxury of sending some of those expenditures out of our state. Yet we continue expanding charters without the guardrails other states have. For example, Massachusetts limits charter tuition payments to 9 percent of a district's school spending, with limited exceptions. Rhode Island has no comparable cap. In some of our urban districts we have already exceeded what Massachusetts law would allow.

There are also serious equity concerns. Public schools educate every child who walks through the door. Charter schools rely on lotteries and applications processes that are opaque at best. And too often students who are not considered a good "fit" end up being "counseled out" and are returning to the district schools that must serve everyone, yet the funds are not recouped for that year.

House Bill 7415 simply gives Rhode Island the opportunity to pause, reassess the fiscal impact of charter expansion, examine equity and accountability, and commit strengthening the public-school systems that educate most of our state's students.

A moratorium and a cap are not radical. They are responsible. We urge you to support House Bill 7415.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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356 SMITH STREET PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02908-3761 (401) 273-9800 FAX (401) 331-8815

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• Maribeth K. Calabro, President • Maria Manzi, Executive Assistant • Bridget McDonough, Administrative Assistant •  
• Michael J. Mullane, Field Representative • James A. Parisi, Field Representative •  
• Christopher Lambert, Field Representative • Jeremy Sencer, Field Representative •  
• Sean Doyle, Field Representative •