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Sent: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 12:56 PM
To: House Education Committee
Cc: Susan Craven
Subject: H7416

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Scott Sutherland
Superintendent
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Johnston, Rhode Island

March 10, 2026

Chairman McNamara and Members of the House Education Committee,

I write to respectfully express my support for House Bill H7415, which proposes a moratorium on the approval or expansion of charter schools in Rhode Island for the coming academic years.

As Superintendent of Johnston Public Schools, my primary responsibility is to ensure that our district can provide stable, high-quality educational opportunities to every student we serve. While charter schools are part of Rhode Island's public education landscape, the continued expansion of charter schools without a broader examination of the fiscal and structural impacts on local districts presents serious challenges.

First, charter school tuition payments create significant financial pressures for local districts. When a student enrolls in a charter school, the tuition payment follows the student; however, the district's fixed costs such as transportation, facilities, staffing, and specialized services remain. In many cases, districts must continue operating schools and maintaining programs even as funding is reduced. This dynamic can make long-term financial planning increasingly difficult for communities like Johnston.

Second, traditional public school districts serve all students, including those with the highest needs. District schools must ensure the availability of specialized programs, services for students with disabilities, multilingual learner support, and a wide range of extracurricular opportunities. As enrollment shifts, districts still must maintain these programs to serve the students who remain, which further strains local resources.

Third, a temporary moratorium provides Rhode Island with an important opportunity to pause and evaluate the overall structure of our public education system. During this time, policymakers can carefully examine issues such as funding formulas, enrollment trends, district capacity, and long-term planning for public school seats across the state. A thoughtful review will help ensure that policies moving forward support both student opportunity and district stability.

Finally, a moratorium does not eliminate school choice or innovation. Rather, it allows the state to take a deliberate and responsible approach to planning so that all public schools district and charter alike operate within a system that is equitable, sustainable, and focused on student success.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support House Bill H7415 and allow Rhode Island the time necessary to study and strengthen the framework that governs public education across our state.

Thank you for your time and your continued commitment to Rhode Island's students and communities.

Respectfully,

Scott Sutherland
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