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Commissioner

State of Rhode Island
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
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March 10, 2026

The Honorable Representative Joseph M. McNamara
Chair, Rhode Island House Committee on Education
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill ~~H7745~~ H 7415 An Act Relating to Education- Establishment of Charter Public Schools

Chair McNamara and members of the House Education Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to express strong opposition to House Bill H7415, which would impose a moratorium on the approval of any new charter public schools or expansions of existing ones, effectively barring the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education from granting such approvals for schools beginning operations in the 2026-2027 school year and beyond, while also restricting state approval and funding for charters not already approved prior to July 1, 2025.

Rhode Island's charter public schools are public schools authorized by the state to operate with greater flexibility in exchange for heightened accountability. They play a vital role in our education ecosystem by offering innovative instructional models, extended learning opportunities, and targeted support for historically underserved communities. Many of our charter schools serve disproportionately high numbers of economically disadvantaged students from educationally underserved communities, precisely the students who benefit most from expanded high-quality options.

RIDE, in collaboration with the Council, has developed a comprehensive system for reviewing, approving, monitoring, and renewing charters based on rigorous performance standards. Recent analyses from Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) have highlighted Rhode Island charters as among the highest-performing in the nation. In the 2023 National Charter School Study III, Rhode Island charter students outperformed their peers in traditional public schools by the equivalent of 90 additional days of learning in reading and 88 additional days in math per year—topping national rankings for charter sector impact. A follow-up 2025 CREDO report on Rhode Island's Charter School Performance Review System credits the state's 2017 overhaul of RIDE's oversight of charter schools with establishing higher-quality standards, greater transparency, consistent, data-driven annual reviews, and alignment with national best practices focused on student outcomes. These reforms have been described as "instrumental in driving" student success and have contributed to sustained academic improvement across the sector.

This strong academic performance of charter school students is matched by robust parental demand. For the 2025-26 school year, families submitted 30,202 applications for just 3,170 available seats—equating to approximately 9.5 applications per seat. This continues a multi-

year trend of high oversubscription, with 78% of applicants residing in Rhode Island's urban core communities. Such demand underscores that Rhode Island families actively seek these high-quality public school options and would benefit from additional opportunities through measured expansion.

Imposing a blanket moratorium would halt this progress at a time when families seek educational excellence. Specifically, H7415 would:

- Prevent the replication and scaling of proven successful models that could benefit more Rhode Island students.
- Limit parental and student choice, particularly in communities where district schools have struggled to meet performance benchmarks.
- Undermine ongoing efforts to address educational inequities by freezing innovation and growth in the charter sector.
- Potentially exacerbate resource strains in districts by removing a mechanism that has helped drive competition and improvement across all public schools.

While we recognize the importance of thoughtful oversight and the need to ensure that all public schools—charter and district alike—serve students equitably, a moratorium is not the appropriate response. Instead, we should continue to refine our authorization and accountability processes—building on the successful framework validated by CREDO—to support high-quality growth where it demonstrably benefits students and responds to clear family demand.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Department of Education respectfully urges the House Education Committee to oppose H7415 and reject measures that would restrict the development of additional high-quality public school options for Rhode Island families.

Thank you for your consideration of this position. RIDE stands ready to provide additional information or testimony as needed.

Sincerely,

Steve Osborn
State Student Opportunity Officer

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Education Committee on Education
The Honorable Mary Duffy Messier