



March 11, 2026

Chair and Members

Rhode Island House of Representatives Education Committee

Rhode Island State House

Providence, Rhode Island

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter and for taking the time to hear from so many voices who care deeply about public education in our state.

My name is Victor Capellan, and I am the Founder and CEO of Collective Action for Education. Over the past twenty-five years, I have had the privilege of serving in public education in three states. My career has included roles in the Providence Public School District as a Facilitator in the Registration Center, as a high school principal in Brooklyn, New York, Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Fall River, Massachusetts, Superintendent of Central Falls Public Schools, and later as a Senior Advisor to the Rhode Island Commissioner of Education.

I am also an immigrant to this country. My mother left everything she knew in search of educational opportunity for her children. Because of that journey, I have dedicated my career to one simple mission: expanding opportunity for children through great public schools.

And I must say that I am tired of seeing people pit one child against another, of hearing arguments framed as “our kids” versus “those kids.” All of the children in Rhode Island are our children.

We often hear that charter public schools siphon funds from traditional districts or that charter schools are growing out of control. Recently, we have also heard the argument that charter schools are somehow creating a “parallel system.”

However, the facts tell a very different story.

Rhode Island has one of the most rigorous charter authorization processes in the country. Applications are carefully reviewed by the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, and most proposals are rejected before they ever reach approval.

In fact, only three new charter public schools have been approved in Rhode Island in the past ten years. That is not a system that is out of control.

I believe that the conversation we should be having is about how best to finance our public schools for all children.

Charter public schools in Rhode Island are already funded below the level of traditional district schools, an indisputable fact. When a student attends a charter public school, the sending district does not lose the entire per-pupil amount. Instead, the district retains between seven and fourteen percent of the funding for students they are no longer responsible for educating.

In other words, charter public schools are already operating with less per-student funding than the districts from which those students come.

If there are legitimate concerns about how public education is financed in Rhode Island, and there are, then the appropriate place to address those concerns is the statewide education funding formula, not a moratorium targeting charter public schools.

This issue should not be solved on the backs of families whose children attend charter public schools.

It is also important to remember that the principle of "money following the student" is not unique to charter schools.

This happens every day when families choose a state career and technical education school such as Davies Career and Technical High School, or when they enroll in another district's CTE program. In those situations, sending districts also experience shifts in enrollment and funding. In fact, some districts receive millions of dollars from other districts through participation in these programs.

So it is fair to ask: if the argument is that districts lose funding when students choose another public school, should we also impose a moratorium on the expansion of CTE programs?

My answer is no.

Instead, we should work together to ensure the funding formula fairly supports all public schools. So why are charter public schools treated differently? That is a question worth asking.

Another argument we hear is that charter schools create a “parallel system” and add unnecessary bureaucracy because they have leaders who function like superintendents or heads of school.

But if that is the argument, we would need to apply the same logic across our entire state.

Rhode Island has thirty-nine cities and towns. That means we also have thirty-nine chiefs of police, thirty-nine fire chiefs, and thirty-nine directors of public works. Local leadership is not considered wasteful in those systems; it is simply how local governance works.

As someone who has served as a superintendent and worked in both large and small school systems, I can also tell you that small districts and single-site charter schools are often the opposite of bureaucratic systems.

They typically do not have layers of central office administration. They do not have multiple assistant superintendents, chief academic officers, and numerous directors. Instead, leaders in these schools often wear multiple hats because they simply cannot afford multiple positions.

The idea that charter schools are creating bloated bureaucracies simply does not hold up to the facts. If anything, we should examine whether some districts have expanded administrative positions even as student enrollment has declined. That is a conversation worth having.

As for this legislation, it actually does much more harm than simply pausing to examine our financial impact.

Because House Bill 7415 does not simply halt charter school growth. It sends a clear message to students and families in our highest-need communities that they do not deserve the same opportunities as those living in wealthier cities and towns.

For many families, charter public schools are not a political issue. They are a pathway to access and opportunity for their children. The demand from families is undeniable.

Last year alone, close to ten thousand families submitted more than thirty thousand applications for just twenty-seven hundred available seats.

So when thousands of families are telling us they need more options, I have to ask: why would the legislature tell them to wait another three years?

This debate should not be about protecting political interests or appeasing special interest groups.

It should be about serving children.

Because when you strip away the politics and the rhetoric, what remains is this: families asking for opportunity.

And each of you has the responsibility to decide whether to say yes or no to those families.

Think about the choices you have made for your own families. Perhaps you—or your parents—moved from one neighborhood to another to access a better school. Think about the families who send their children to private schools. They have those options because they have the means.

Now imagine being a parent who cannot move to another community and cannot afford private school. Now imagine that parent being told that opportunity is simply denied!

Before voting on this bill, I ask you to imagine that it is your child on that waiting list.

Would you vote to keep the door open—or would you close it?

That is the choice before you. However, I humbly ask you to oppose this bill.

Finally, please remember that they are all our children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Victor Capellan
Founder & CEO
Collective Action for Education