

March 10, 2026

Honorable Joseph M. McNamara, Chair
House Committee on Education

RE: HJR8131 - Joint Resolution Creating a Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study Rhode Island's Method of Funding Charter Schools

Dear Chair McNamara,

My name is Caleigh Rockwal and I am a Social Studies Teacher at Hope High School and a resident of Providence, Rhode Island. I am here today as a citizen to express my **support** of the passage of House Joint Resolution 8131.

I am currently in my fourth year teaching in Providence Public Schools and my seventh year as a public school educator. In that relatively short amount of time, I have witnessed firsthand the fiscal impact that charter schools have on the quality of education my public school students are able to receive. Just two years ago, I was here at the State House testifying against the closure of 360 High School - a school beloved by teachers, students, and families alike and closed because it would save PPSD \$1,000,000 dollars in the budget. Now, 16 staff members at Hope were told that their positions will be cut next year because enrollment is projected to decline to 620 students - a nearly 200-student loss over two years. In my department, that means going from eight Social Studies teachers down to five.

We can trace these cuts to charter schools directly. PPSD allocates \$36,000,000 a year to charter school tuition - more than enough to save the \$1,000,000 it would have cost to save 360 High School or the \$1.2 million it would cost to save the positions at Hope.

We also know that urban districts like PPSD, which have higher proportions of multilingual learners and students with IEPs, are disproportionately affected by charter school enrollment. 47.3% of all charter school students across the state are students living in Providence. Such a high number would imply that the demographics of students enrolled in charter schools would look similar to the demographics of students enrolled in PPSD, yet this is not the case. While 19% of PPSD students receive special education services and 40% are multilingual learners, only 8% of Achievement First's and 5% of Excel Academy's students receive special education services and only 29% of Achievement First's and 21% of Excel Academy's students are multilingual learners.

Charter schools, especially mayoral academies like Achievement First and Excel Academy, do not serve the same demographics of students that Providence Public Schools do. They take our funding and use it for students who need less. The growth of charter school enrollment is an equity issue, especially for our Providence students. My students deserve the very best, and what is best is being threatened by the budget cuts caused by the growth of charter school enrollment.

The cuts that we are facing in PPSD are serious. School closures and staff reductions impact more than just jobs, they impact the students, families, and school communities who are left to grieve what is lost. We are building something really special at Hope right now. We are in the middle of our arts redesign process, we launched a brand-new film production CTE program this year, and we just participated in the Rhode Island State Drama Festival for the first time in a decade. But we cannot see this work through if we don't have the staff, the stability, and the investment of the district and the state.

I encourage you to pass this resolution so we can begin to uncover the truth about the two disparate education systems that are currently funded by the State of Rhode Island and we can begin to repair the harm that decades of divestment has caused.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caleigh Rockwal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent than the last.

Caleigh Rockwal