

**CHRISTOPHER E. BUONANNO**

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**COMMITTEES**  
Public Works Committee  
Ordinance Committee

**CITY COUNCIL**

869 Park Avenue

Cranston, Rhode Island 02910

March 10, 2026

**Written Testimony in Favor of H 7415 and H 8131**

Dear Members of the Rhode Island House of Representatives,

I am writing to express my support for H7415 and H8131 and to encourage thoughtful consideration of how Rhode Island funds and manages the growth of charter schools.

The charter school movement began with simple idea: that charter schools could function as laboratory schools where educators test innovative strategies and new approaches that could ultimately strengthen public education. They were meant to be experiments. However, that concept has morphed into something quite different. Now, instead of serving primarily as centers of innovation, charter schools now operate as parallel school systems, duplicating services already provided by our traditional public schools while drawing away critical funding, not to mention drawing away talented students away from their home districts and their peers. Some of them today even function for profit.

This diversion of resources places significant strain on local districts. When critical funding is redirected, it directly impacts staffing, programming, and the maintenance of public-school facilities. In many communities, it also contributes to aging buildings and deferred maintenance as districts struggle to meet the needs of all students with fewer resources. It also puts an additional burden on the State of Rhode Island, as many municipalities request additional funds for public schools during budget season. And this diversion of public taxpayer funds does not come with the intense scrutiny of the spending of those funds.

The legislation before you provides a thoughtful and measured response. The bill would pause the approval of new charter schools or expansions for three school years—from 2026 through 2029—to allow the state time to review existing policy and evaluate the full impact of charter school growth and expansion. It would also prevent new state funding approvals for charter expansions during this period unless those approvals were granted prior to July 1, 2025. This would keep critical dollars in the districts from which they were derived. This pause is not about eliminating existing charter schools, or even future ones; rather, it creates space for a careful assessment of the fiscal and educational effects that continued expansion has on local districts. For communities like Cranston, this review period could provide needed financial stability and relief.

Equally important is the creation of a Charter Funding Study Commission. Rhode Island's education funding formula has not been comprehensively reviewed since 2010, despite

substantial changes in the number and scale of charter schools operating across the state. Today, Rhode Island has 24 charter organizations operating 39 schools. A legislative commission that brings together educators, municipal leaders, legislators, and charter representatives would allow the state to take a comprehensive and collaborative look at whether the current funding structure still works for all students and communities.

As John Adams once said, "The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people." Our public schools fulfill that promise every day by serving every student who walks through their doors. Taking the time to evaluate how we fund and structure our education system is a responsible step toward ensuring that promise continues.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support for H7415 and H8131.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to the students and communities of Rhode Island.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christopher E. Buonanno". The signature is written in black ink and features a large, elegant flourish at the end of the name.

Christopher E. Buonanno  
Councilman City-Wide (R)  
City of Cranston, Rhode Island

Hilary Conners  
2 Woodmist Circle  
Coventry, RI 02816  
3/10/2026

Dear Senator Raptakis and Representative Noret,

I am writing as a Rhode Island resident to express my strong support for H8131, the bill that would establish a commission to study charter school expansion in our state. Before allowing further expansion, it is essential that Rhode Island carefully evaluate the real impacts charter schools have on students, families, and our public education system.

One area that deserves particular attention is how students with disabilities are served within charter schools. There are ongoing concerns that charter schools are not always equipped to adequately meet the needs of students who require specialized services. I have seen first hand students with disabilities being encouraged or pressured to leave when the charters they attend cannot provide the appropriate supports. This raises serious equity concerns and shifts the responsibility for these students back onto traditional public schools, which must serve all students regardless of need.

Another issue worth examining is staffing. Charter schools often rely on less experienced or underqualified staff, sometimes due to lower pay or fewer certification requirements compared to traditional public schools. While many educators in charter schools work hard for their students, inconsistent training and qualifications can make it difficult to provide the high-quality, specialized instruction that many students need.

A study commission would allow Rhode Island to examine these concerns thoroughly and gather data about student outcomes, staffing qualifications, special education services, and the broader financial impact of charter school expansion on district schools. Decisions about expanding charter schools should be based on transparent evidence and a full understanding of how these schools affect all students.

I believe Rhode Island has a responsibility to ensure that every student—including those with disabilities—has access to a well-resourced, equitable education. Establishing this commission is a responsible and necessary step before moving forward with further charter school growth.

Thank you for your time and for your service to our community. I respectfully urge you to support H8131.

Sincerely,  
Hilary Conners