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Rhode Island Works Best When We Say **UNION YES.**

March 10, 2026

Chairman Joseph M. McNamara
House Education Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of HB7415, HB7906, and HR8131

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO, which represents over 80,000 working people across the state, I write in support of House Bills 7415 and 7906 and House Resolution 8131. Together, these proposals represent thoughtful and necessary steps towards strengthening Rhode Island's public education system.

Rhode Island's public schools are one of the most important public institutions in our communities. They educate our children, employ thousands of workers and serve as anchors in cities and towns across the state. Ensuring that public education remains adequately funded, equipped for 21st century learning, and supportive of its workforce is critical to the success of students across our communities.

House Bill 7415 would pause the approval of new charter schools or expansions beginning with the 2026–2027 school year and would prevent state funding from being appropriated to charter schools not already approved prior to July 1, 2025.

This measure recognizes a fundamental challenge in public education finance: when students leave traditional public school districts for charter schools, the funding tied to those students follows them, but many of the district's fixed costs remain. As a result, the expansion of charter schools places significant financial strain on local school districts and municipalities that must continue operating its buildings, transportation systems, and critical student services.

Ensuring that the state takes a measured approach to charter expansion helps protect the financial stability of local public schools and allows policymakers the opportunity to assess the long-term impacts on communities and taxpayers.

House Bill 7906 would require charter schools applying for renewal or seeking approval for a new charter to include a union neutrality clause. This would ensure that charter schools remain neutral during union organizing efforts, prohibit retaliation against employees for their views on union representation, and allow workers reasonable access to speak with labor organizations about their rights.

The RI AFL-CIO is committed to ensuring that whether you work in traditional public schools or charter schools, everyone deserves the same ability to organize and advocate for fair wages, benefits, and working conditions without intimidation or fear of retaliation. Union neutrality simply ensures that workers can freely exercise their rights under labor law.

Finally, House Resolution 8131 would establish a special joint legislative commission to study the state's method of funding charter schools and report recommendations back to the General Assembly. The current school funding formula, which includes the mechanism for funding charter schools, was established more than a decade ago. Since that time, the number of charter schools have expanded

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significantly, creating additional local education agencies and increasing administrative and funding complexities within the system. Putting further strain on an already critically underfunded system.

A comprehensive review of the funding structure is long overdue and necessary to ensure that state policy supports students while maintaining fiscal stability for school districts and municipalities.

Each of these bills represent a balanced approach to navigating a complex education system. They recognize the importance of protecting public education resources, safeguarding worker rights, and ensuring that policy decisions are informed by careful analysis and transparency. Public education should remain a cornerstone of opportunity in Rhode Island, and policies that strengthen public schools ultimately strengthen the communities where Rhode Island families live and work.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island AFL-CIO respectfully urges the Committee to support House Bills 7415 and 7906 and House Resolution 8131. Thank you for your time and consideration of these important issues, please do not hesitate to contact me at 401-490-1599, should you require any further information.

Respectfully submitted,



Erica A. Hammond
Legislative Director, Rhode Island AFL-CIO