

**RI House Education Committee Hearing Testimony**  
**Tuesday, March 10, 2026**

**SUPPORT:** [H 7415](#) & [HJR 8131](#)

**REJECT:** [H 7615](#)

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the House Education Committee:

As a lifelong Rhode Island resident and a product of public schools from Kindergarten through my PhD in Education, I am writing to **support House Bill 7415** which would create a moratorium on the approval and expansion of charter schools, and to **support House Joint Resolution 8131** which would create a 13-member legislative commission to conduct a comprehensive review of charter school funding formulas and administrative spending. Additionally, I urge you to **reject H7615** which would allow LEAs to adopt an all-charter public school district model.

All Rhode Island students deserve the highest quality education possible, available at their neighborhood, community schools. We must fully fund our traditional public schools and stop the expansion of charters now.

I have spent my career leading education programs, preparing language educators for our public schools, and supporting the improvement and expansion of K-16 world language and dual language bilingual education programs. Through my work as a teacher educator, I spent countless hours inside of public and charter schools supervising teacher candidates and interacting with students and faculty. As an example, over the past few years, I have had teacher candidates working on emergency certification as world language teachers at Achievement First Providence High School. In no public high school did I ever see the level of disengagement and apathy from students as I did at AFHS. Students were permitted by the administration to use cell phones and other electronic devices throughout class periods, even when I observed highly engaging, relevant lessons prepared by my teacher candidates. Our higher education institutions have noted a lack of preparation of students for college-level work.

For the past decade, I have lived and worked in Olneyville, where we have a strong public, neighborhood elementary school, William D'Abate, which offers a bilingual education program and has strong, consistent leadership and amazing teachers and staff who are bilingual and represent the community they serve. At the same time, I am incredibly frustrated to see parents in my community fed a narrative that turns them away from our public schools, promising them better education in charter schools. These schools claim to be public schools, but they do not have the same accountability from the state, nor are they required to serve all students. Charter schools serve significantly fewer multilingual learners (MLLs) and students with disabilities than their sending districts, and many turn these students away. I have heard many stories from families of children with IEPs who have enrolled at charter schools, only to be sent back to

PPSD after a couple of weeks at the school. This is not just hearsay, but is substantiated with data:

- Statewide, the special education reimbursement budget is around \$15 million per year with the highest reimbursement totals going to the largest public school districts:
  - ◆ Providence (\$4.3 million)
  - ◆ Cranston (\$1.3 million)
  - ◆ Pawtucket (\$795,000).
  - ◆ By comparison, the statewide charter school reimbursement total is \$34,050.
- RI charters enroll 14,159 students and they have so successfully excluded high-need special education students that they only have a little over \$34,000 in reimbursable special education expenses! Cranston has \$1.3 million in reimbursable expenses for only 9,712 students!

In our small state, we cannot afford to continue to allow the expansion of a separate system of schools that do not serve all students. The fiscal impact of creating two separate public education systems in a time of declining enrollment and loss of federal funding must be carefully considered in these decisions in order to ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all Rhode Island students.

I urge passage of H7415 and [HJR 8131](#) and urge the committee to REJECT: [H 7615](#). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Erin L. Papa, Ph.D.  
*Resident of Providence (02909)*  
*House District 8*