



RHODE ISLAND  
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND  
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS <sup>AFT</sup>  
AFL-CIO

House Education Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

March 10, 2026

Dear Chairperson McNamara & Members of the House Education Committee:

I respectfully urge passage of both H7415 (Charter moratorium/cap reduction) and H8131 (Commission to study charter school funding and costs).

I write as the Professional Issues Director for the American Federation of Teachers state affiliate, the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers & Health Professionals, AFL-CIO. My duties are related to supporting effective education policy and regulations as well as developing, coordinating and implementing high quality, research-based professional development for educators.

The original concept of charter schools was to develop “hubs”; centers for innovation that could serve as models to identify best practice in teaching and learning that could be shared among all public school educators. After twenty-five years of the Rhode Island charter school experiment, there is no tangible evidence that charter schools provide more innovation than traditional public schools. Data related to test scores, curriculum, as well as academic programming and social/emotional safety nets for children do not bear this out. For certain, charter schools do not provide more diverse opportunities for differently abled students than traditional public schools, often counseling such students back into the traditional public school system.

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The charter funding model of the “money following the student” has created a parallel educational system in Rhode Island whereby traditional public schools are required to fund charter schools. Municipalities are required to send *locally collected taxpayer dollars* to charter schools, that are often operating in other municipalities. This forces most public school districts to make program cuts in order to balance their budgets. Rhode Island is exacerbating the harmful impact of supporting too many charter schools where even other, smaller, independent charters are feeling the constraint of funding limitations causing them to also face their own mortality.

My primary focus in this letter is educator professional development. Professional development for educators is first and foremost about providing effective, research backed training in professional practice that best serves children and their families. When traditional public schools make difficult budgetary decisions, there is often no way to mitigate the burden of most of the fixed costs. What is left are cuts to variable costs such as eliminating secondary school course offerings, extracurricular activities, athletics or professional development for teachers.

In my thirty-four years of experience in Rhode Island public education, I’ve heard many arguments about Rhode Island being too small of a state to have so many school districts. Although most Rhode Islanders seem to value their communities and autonomy, it is true that providing some services requires careful planning and collaboration. The Rhode Island charter system has taken thirty-six school districts and created about sixty local education agencies. Collaboration is virtually non-existent and the only sharing of resources includes traditional public schools “sharing” dollars with (directly funding) the charter schools.

The Commissioner of the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has foisted a political ideology of supporting charter schools while shelving public school programs with the same offerings. This was most recently displayed when the De La Comunidad Bilingual K-12 Charter school was approved by RIDE absent any support from sending district’s elected policy officials as required by law. At nearly the same time, Gilbert Stuart Middle School in Providence, which provided dual-language instruction and supported a

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very large population of Multilingual Language Learners was shuttered. This is but one example of innovative programming and professional development to better serve students and families being the casualty of the charter school ideology.

In addition, RIDE has recently promulgated new regulations related to mandatory teacher training for Multilingual Language Learners. While such training is greatly needed, there is no provision for funding to implement the mandate. On one hand RIDE has proliferated the state with charter schools that rely on traditional district funds and then, on the other hand, has increased financial burden on those same traditional school districts. In essence this model has caused the diminishment of high-quality professional development; the opposite of the original purpose of creating “hubs of innovation”.

For the reasons stated herein, and other valid arguments that I am sure you will hear in testimony, I believe that both a moratorium on the approval of new charter school applications, as well as a commission to study the funding flaws of the entire Rhode Island charter system, are vitally important.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sean J. Doyle

RIFTHP Professional Issues Director

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