

Subject: Please Support H7526 – Classroom Safety

Dear Chair McNamara and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Nancy Garnett-Thomas, and I am a Social Studies teacher in Cranston. I am writing to ask for your support of **H7526**, legislation that would give teachers the authority to remove students from classrooms when behavior creates safety risks or major disruptions.

“Educators are responsible for maintaining safe and productive learning environments. When serious disruptions occur, teachers must be able to respond quickly in order to protect students and staff and ensure that learning can continue for the rest of the class. The bill also helps ensure that students who are removed from the classroom receive appropriate support and intervention before returning, so they can successfully re-engage in the learning environment.”

Personal experience:

Throughout my 30 years as a public school educator both in my current district as well as 2 others in RI, I have personally experienced too many situations where classroom disruptions particularly those involving unsafe behavioral practices made it difficult to continue instruction. For example:

A few years ago, I had a female student randomly decide to stand up and attack another female student in the room by jumping on her back and clawing at her face. Although this was the first time she had exhibited this behavior in my class, I later discovered that she had a history of uncontrolled rage and had been removed from other classes before. This event threw the class into chaos with other students jumping onto their phones to video the event. Administration had to come and subdue both parties as well as interview all of the other students and discuss proper, at that time, phone usage. Obviously, the lesson that day was not a success plus it made us all feel less safe in our own classroom.

At some point she was removed from my class, and eventually the school, but I would have preferred that her issues be addressed before coming to my class. Clearly she needed help dealing with anger management. Keeping her in classes did not help her; it just seemed to exacerbate her issues.

Providing administrators with clear authority to address these situations should help ensure that classrooms remain safe and supportive places for all students to learn and I am sincerely asking you to consider this legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Nancy Garnett-Thomas
Social Studies Educator
Cranston Public Schools

Email testimony to: HouseEducation@rilegislature.gov