

Testimony HB8266

Chair and Members of the House Education Committee,

My name is Joshua Laplante, and I am writing in strong support of House Bill 8266, which proposes the creation of a special legislative commission to study expanding pathways into the teaching profession.

I bring 26 years of experience as an educator, with approximately half of that time spent as a school and district leader responsible for recruiting, hiring, and supporting high-quality teaching staff. Over the course of my career, I have witnessed a steady and concerning shift: it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain qualified educators. What was once a competitive hiring landscape has, in many cases, become a persistent struggle to fill positions.

This challenge is well documented. Research from the Annenberg Institute at Brown University highlights ongoing staffing shortages across Rhode Island, particularly in schools serving our highest-need students. These shortages contribute to increased reliance on long-term substitutes, larger class sizes, and, at times, underprepared staff all of which are conditions that directly impact student learning, equity, and outcomes.

Nationally, the Learning Policy Institute has also documented widespread teacher shortages driven by factors such as declining enrollment in preparation programs, increased attrition, and insufficiently supported early-career teachers. Their research underscores that without systemic action, these shortages will persist and deepen.

House Bill 8266 represents a thoughtful and necessary response to these challenges. The creation of a commission to study educator preparation, certification, and early-career support is both timely and essential. Importantly, this bill seeks to modernize and strengthen the profession by removing unnecessary barriers while maintaining preparation rigor and accountability.

I am particularly encouraged by the bill's emphasis on transparency through the collection and public reporting of statewide data on educator recruitment, retention, and workforce diversity. Having consistent, accessible data will allow policymakers, districts, and preparation programs to make informed decisions and to track progress over time. As someone who has directly faced these staffing challenges, I know how critical it is to move beyond perception and toward shared, actionable insight.

Additionally, the diversity of the commission's composition is a significant strength. By including representatives from K-12 education, higher education, nonprofit organizations, labor, alternative certification pathways, and policy makers, the commission reflects a broad cross-section of stakeholders who are deeply invested in both expanding access to the profession and maintaining its quality. This level of representation increases the likelihood that recommendations will be practical, inclusive, and responsive to real conditions in the field.

The bill's focus on multiple pathways into teaching, financial accessibility, improved mentorship, and stronger alignment between preparation and classroom realities reflects what practitioners across the state have long recognized: we must treat teaching as a critical workforce pipeline and invest accordingly.

In my professional experience, the future of our education system depends not only on what we expect from educators, but on how we support and develop them. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support House Bill 8266.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the future of Rhode Island's students and educators.

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Support HR-8266