



Family Court of the State of Rhode Island
One Dorrance Plaza
Providence, RI 02903

May 18, 2026

MICHAEL B. FORTE
CHIEF JUDGE

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara
House Committee on Education
Rhode Island State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: Support for H 8531 – An Act Relating to Education -- Compulsory Attendance

Dear Chair McNamara and Committee Members:

I am writing to express my strong support for 2026 - H 8531, entitled “An Act Relating to Education -- Compulsory Attendance.”

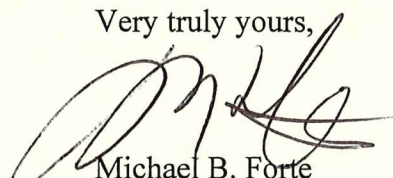
This legislation addresses an important gap in Rhode Island law regarding compulsory school attendance and the approval of at-home instruction. Under current law, parents may seek approval for homeschooling even after truancy proceedings have been initiated or charges have been filed for failure to ensure a child attends school. As a result, the existing statutory framework does not provide school committees with adequate authority to determine whether a homeschooling request is being made in good faith or whether it is being used to avoid accountability for educational neglect.

The proposed legislation takes a balanced approach. It does not prohibit homeschooling, nor does it diminish the constitutional right of parents to direct the education of their children. Instead, it authorizes local school committees to deny or temporarily defer approval when there are documented concerns arising from pending truancy petitions or attendance-related civil or criminal proceedings. At the same time, the bill expressly preserves parents’ rights to present evidence demonstrating good cause for prior nonattendance, good faith in seeking homeschooling, and the competency and capacity to provide an adequate educational program.

This bill also includes important procedural safeguards. It requires written findings, establishes reasonable timeliness for decision-making, provides an opportunity for parents to be heard, and creates an administrative appeal process through the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. These provisions ensure transparency, consistency, and due process while prioritizing the educational needs and best interests of children.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the House Committee on Education to support and advance this important legislation, which provides a balanced and constitutionally sound framework to protect children from educational neglect while preserving the rights of parents acting in good faith.

Very truly yours,



Michael B. Forte
Chief Judge