

Dear Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Lisa Nichols and I am currently an educator in the Burrillville School District. I have instructed secondary English methods teachers and student teaching seminars at Rhode Island College with the Teach for America program. I received a Ph.D. in education from the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College. I was the first secondary English teacher in the state to receive National Board Teacher Certification and successfully renewed it twice. I am on a team to evaluate the education programs at Johnson & Wales University. I am a member of NEARI and the secretary of the Burrillville teachers' Union representing about 200 members. If it weren't for the pension reforms in 2012, I would be out in the field, where the need is so strong, training new teachers to enter the career.

I love to be in the classroom educating students. I love to discuss pedagogy at the universities and to immerse myself in best practices of teaching and learning. I have had students become brain surgeons, NASA engineers, and teachers. I have devoted 35 years of my life to Rhode Island's public school students. We are in a crisis. Right now, I would never recommend to my daughter or any of my students that they pursue education as a career and this is something that I thought I would never say.

Public schools are in danger. In our state, too much of the state funding is going to the charter schools. Why is a greater percentage of the budget going to a minority of the schools? Does the government want the public schools to fail? Teachers do more than our job every day. We go above and beyond for kids every day. We spend our own money and our time (outside of contractual obligations) giving and giving until we can't give any more. That is the very nature of the person who becomes an educator. Now, it is time for Congress and the town of Burrillville to do their job and give us the resources and funds we need to provide students with a rigorous and quality education so that they can go on and become successful, intelligent working members of the community.

Over the past 35 years, I have witnessed tremendous change in the public school system and none of it is good. Social media and the internet is resulting in rampant health crises, cheating, plagiarism, bullying. Teachers are not equipped with the resources to meet the mounting challenges. The job has undeniably gotten harder and the pay has not kept up with the demands of the job. It is no surprise that the enrollment around the country in teacher education programs is way down. It is no surprise that 44% of teachers leave the profession in the first 5 years. We don't have the money that we need to recruit and retain qualified teachers.

Burrillville has gotten a huge cut in state aid. We have had 2 open science positions at the high school all year! My daughter got a degree in plant science from URI. She never would have gotten there if she couldn't take science classes in high school! The talented school psychologist that works with many of my students is planning to leave for a job in Massachusetts where she will make almost \$20,000 a year more with a better pension. In Burrillville we have lost 30 teachers in the last few years and my prediction is 30 more in the next two years.

When my colleagues and I leave at the end of the school day, we are emotionally and physically exhausted. We have the embarrassing distinction of being the lowest paid district in the state, yet everyone I know goes above and beyond for students. They often use their own money to purchase school supplies, clothes, and food for students. Why won't the town of Burrillville and the state of Rhode Island properly recognize this and do their part by giving us the money we

need and not further demoralizing us with cuts and hurting our students? We need their help to face the challenges of public education in the years to come. Every year I ask to run a theater course at the middle school and every year the answer is no. Now we are facing more cuts—the loss of at least 6 teachers, 3 para professionals, not to mention programs and athletics. We want our students to have the best. We don't want to see them and their tax money leave for a private or public neighboring school that offers more arts or a CTE program that we don't have. We want a competitive contract and a salary that approaches the state average so we can fill those science positions. Now, please help and vote to better fund our district so that we can still engage in, what once was, the most noble of all professions,

Sincerely,

Lisa A. Nichols, Ph.D.