

April 29, 2025

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chair  
House Finance Committee  
Rhode Island House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: BILL NUMBER H-5399 – A N A C T RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE EDUCATION EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX RELIEF ACT

Chair Abney and Honorable Committee Members,

On behalf of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 5399.

This legislation aligns closely with one of the League's core principles: municipal governments should not be burdened with unfunded state mandates. For too long, school districts across Rhode Island have been forced to absorb the costs of mandates that are not fully funded by the state, diverting limited and valuable resources away from the classroom. These mandates often force difficult choices, cutting essential educational programs, reducing staff, or limiting student services, in order to comply with requirements that are imposed without corresponding state support.

House Bill 5399 would give school districts greater autonomy and flexibility beginning July 1, 2026, by allowing them to opt out of mandates that are not fully funded through the education aid formula or other sources provided by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This shift would empower local education leaders to prioritize expenditures that best reflect the needs of their students and communities, without facing reductions in state aid for making fiscally responsible decisions.

Moreover, this legislation reinforces another top priority of the League and its member municipalities: strengthening local decision-making authority. Communities are best positioned to understand the needs of their students and schools. By ensuring that state-imposed requirements are paired with adequate funding or a fair cost-sharing formula, we can promote sound educational policy without undermining local budgets or forcing trade-offs that hurt student outcomes.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi  
Executive Director

Cc: Honorable Members of House Finance Committee