

Dr. Dana C Doucette, Ed.D

March 18, 2025

In favor of House Bill 5749

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My Name is Dr. Dana Doucette. I am an elementary educator in the East Greenwich school department and a resident of Warwick, where my children attend public schools. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today in support of House Bill 5749. Thank you, in particular, to Rep Caldwell and the other sponsors who have brought forward this critical piece of legislation on behalf of the students in Rhode Island.

As I write this in March, many lower elementary students celebrated a leprechaun visiting their classrooms, upper elementary, middle, and high school students prepared for yearly state testing to begin April, and behind closed doors, administrators and district leaders look ahead to plan for another year of balancing annual shifts in the amount of education funding allocated by federal, state, and local agencies. In the United States, each state is responsible for ensuring that schools have sufficient funding to operate and provide every student with a quality education. The Rhode Island Funding Formula that was passed in 2010 takes into consideration variances among communities and allocates funds equitably where needed to build a strong foundation for all children. However, with so many variables that are uncontrollable by school district leaders, state funding formulas sometimes leave districts with allocated funds that are insufficient to cover the cost of providing their students with the necessary supplies, resources, personnel, and programs to be successful. State funding formulas factor in the ability of local municipalities to contribute the rest of the needed funds. However, no law in Rhode Island requires the town to do so. Research has shown that school districts, even with strong educators, high-quality curricula, and instructional support, will struggle if they lack the funds necessary.

Based on the projected federal, state, and local funding for the 2025-2026 school year, some districts in RI will fall short of sufficient financing, requiring district leaders to make hard decisions that will impact student achievement. East Greenwich is one of them. My district leaders are currently looking at the numbers and trying to decide what can be cut from a budget whose per-pupil spending is in the bottom third of the state. No matter what is decided, the students will feel the most impact.

I have been an educator since 2006 and an East Greenwich teacher since 2011. I have proudly worn my RI Kids pin, which was given to me at the Rhode Island Teacher of the Year ceremony in 2023. In my 18 years of experience in education, I can tell you that when districts are forced to make cuts, it causes a ripple effect that is felt for years to come. When educational programs are cut, students' test scores and achievement levels are negatively impacted. When extracurricular programs are cut, attendance and graduation rates decline. Reducing support staff leads to an increase in negative student behaviors and a decrease in student engagement. Cuts made to professional development will hinder teachers' ability to implement high-quality curricula effectively, causing a decline in student achievement. When any district is faced with having to make cuts, it puts a strain on public education and widens the inequity gap across the state. The balancing act of federal, state and local funding still needs to be fully achieved statewide to ensure ALL students have what they need to be successful. Please support House Bill 5749 so district leaders can access the supplemental funds necessary to compensate when funding formulas and local municipalities fall short.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 5749. I appreciate your consideration, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dana Doucette

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