

My name is Jamie Ellen LaRose, and I am a Rhode Island resident and dedicated educator with 23 years of service in our public schools. My mother was also a teacher who dedicated her life to public education in RI and retired in 2004. I am writing today to express my strong **support for Legislation 2026-H 7160**, introduced by Representative William W. O'Brien.

The proposed "Rule of 85" is a vital step toward restoring the dignity of the teaching profession in our state and ensuring the long-term health of our education system.

Teaching is an incredibly rewarding and impactful career, but it is also one of the most mentally and emotionally taxing professions. By the time many educators reach their 25th year, the cumulative stress is significant. The Rule of 85 provides a fair pathway to retirement that acknowledges this toll.

In my own school, we have spent the last two years grappling with a persistent teacher shortage. We are increasingly relying on long-term substitutes to fill vacancies. While these individuals work hard, they cannot provide the same consistency or specialized expertise as a permanent, certified faculty member.

Our students deserve faculty members who are not just qualified, but enthusiastic and healthy. By modernizing the pension system, we make the profession more attractive to the next generation of talented Rhode Islanders, ensuring that the "void" currently filled by substitutes is instead filled by passionate professionals.

Reform is not just about those of us nearing the end of our careers; it is a signal to young people considering education that Rhode Island values their contribution and wellbeing. To maintain a high standard of education, we must offer a competitive and sustainable retirement structure.

I respectfully urge the House Finance Committee to recommend **H 7160** for passage. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Rhode Island's teachers and students.

Sincerely,

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