

Chris O'Brien

From: Arena, Nicole <Nicole.Arena@ppsd.org>
Sent: Wednesday, April 15, 2026 2:47 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Letter of Support for Rule of 90 Legislation Bills 2023-H-5092 and 2023-S86H

Categories: Red category

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Dear Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Nicole Arena, and I am a Providence teacher and special education teacher with 19 years of experience, beginning my career in Central Falls. I am writing to urge you, from both a professional and deeply personal perspective, to support the Rule of 90 retirement legislation currently before you.

In Providence, it is not uncommon for teachers to dedicate well over 25 years of their lives to serving our students and families. These are not just careers—they are lifetimes of commitment to children, to communities, and to a profession that demands everything we have. Yet under the current Rule of 95, many of these same educators are being asked to continue working far beyond what is reasonable, even as the physical and emotional toll of the job continues to grow.

Teaching in Providence is incredibly demanding. Every day, educators carry the weight of their students' academic needs, emotional wellbeing, and the challenges that come with working in an urban district. Over time, that responsibility becomes heavier, not lighter. Many experienced teachers are not simply "ready" to retire—they are exhausted. They are worn down. And still, they stay, because they have no choice.

What is most difficult to say—but important to acknowledge—is the impact this has on teachers' health. Too many of us have seen colleagues become seriously ill after decades of service, or pass away before ever reaching retirement. These are educators who gave their entire careers to their students, only to never fully benefit from the retirement they earned. That reality is heartbreaking, and it should not be accepted as part of this profession.

The rising cost of living in Rhode Island only adds to this strain. Teachers who have spent decades serving Providence are increasingly worried about whether they will ever be able to retire with dignity, stability, and peace of mind. The current system asks them to give more years, more energy, and more of their health—at a time when many have already given everything they can.

The Rule of 90 offers a fair and humane alternative. It recognizes the reality of this profession and provides educators with a realistic path to retirement—one that allows them to leave the classroom with their health, their dignity, and a sense of closure to a career of service.

This change would also have a meaningful impact on our schools. Providence is already facing challenges with staffing, recruitment, and retention. New teachers are hesitant to enter a profession where the path to retirement feels so distant and uncertain. By supporting the Rule of 90, you are not only

honoring veteran educators—you are also making the profession more sustainable and attractive for the next generation.

This is more than a policy decision. It is a question of fairness, of respect, and of how we value the people who have dedicated their lives to educating our children.

I respectfully ask that you support the Rule of 90 legislation and help ensure that Providence teachers are given a retirement system that reflects the reality of their service and the dignity they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Nicole Arena
Providence Teacher
Lillian Feinstein @ Sackett