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Chairman Abney and
Members of the House Committee on Finance
c/o Christopher O'Brien, Committee Clerk
HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Committee on Finance,

I am a 64-year resident of Pawtucket. I attended Elementary and Jr. High in the city before transferring to Davies Vo-Tech for High School. I have raised two daughters through the Pawtucket Public School system and at that time I was actively involved in the PTO, raising funds for special events for our students and eventually raising money to have a gym floor resurfaced at Goff, because it wasn't in the budget. Today, I am the grandmother of a 4th grade student in the Pawtucket Public School system, and a proud member of the Pawtucket School Committee.

While I cannot speak for the Committee as a whole, I can tell you about my experience during my last 20 years of service. As I entered the School Committee I learned a few very important things. There was a moratorium on building, we were being level funded, and there just wasn't enough money to manage repairs or upgrades to our systems, and more importantly our students were living in poverty and deserved better. We did the best we could. Today, I know we still have high poverty rates and a low median income level. I also know that the moratorium on building was lifted and we could start taking care of our buildings the way they should be, but it is a slow process and dependent on grants and bonding.

We have been fortunate to rehabilitate two elementary school buildings. Have built two new elementary buildings and are working on a 2100-seat High School meant to unify our three (3) Pawtucket High Schools. Bonding is a great thing, however due to economic factors the city has its limits.

I have been an advocate for all our students for a very long time. Today I advocate specifically for Slater Middle School. There are so many things that need to be done, and no significant money to do it. The building has needed to be repointed for years. The

caulking on the windows is falling out and there is the question of asbestos, the gymnasium does not have sound buffers, and the noise sometimes exceeds 8 decibels. The auditorium is in ruins and there is no place but the cafeteria to hold school functions. We had to take care of the hall windows because when it rained, the stairwells flooded, and there is a constant influx of mice and rats in the school that we work hard to manage. I could go on. The students at Slater Middle School have gone for a long time without. They deserve better.

For 20 years I have advocated for warm, dry, healthy environments for our students to learn. Today, I am focused on Slater Middle School. However, the city does not have the ability to leverage any more bonds to either rehab or rebuild. We just had one tax increase of 6.4% and now face another tax increase to ensure we have sufficient funds for the Debt Service incurred by bonding and manage city operations.

The residents and students of Pawtucket need the help of the General Assembly and your Committee. I ask that you consider extending the initial funding for the rehab or rebuilding of Slater Middle School. In 2029, our new high school will be built and the city has indicated that they could manage the funding at that time. To make our students remain in substandard conditions is unfair to them and we need your help.

Based on the money available and guidance from RIDE, we have worked diligently and equitably to provide our students with the safe, warm and dry buildings they need.

I hope, with your assistance, Slater can be the next building to undergo a rehab or rebuild.

If you have any questions or require further information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Joanne Bonollo