



April 24, 2026

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

RE: Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act

I am writing to express my and NEARI's strong support for House Bill 8351, the Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act.

I had the privilege and honor of serving as a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission, a diverse group of education and community leaders convened by the Rhode Island Foundation and guided by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Over the course of more than a year, our Commission worked to develop a consensus set of recommendations for a fair, equitable, and adequate school funding system for Rhode Island. The legislation before you reflects those recommendations.

This was not easy work and required groups, individuals, and organizations with differing and competing priorities to reach consensus. My role on the Commission was to represent the voice of NEARI's members, teachers, and education support professionals, who work with Rhode Island's students every day in a system that expects more but often funds less. The voices of educators are key to insuring a fair and equitable funding formula for all Rhode Island students.

It has been 15 years since the creation of Rhode Island's school funding formula and education, our communities, and our students and their needs have changed significantly since then.

Rhode Island's current school funding system does not adequately or equitably support our students and communities. The current funding formula does not capture the full cost to educate a child in our state. It does not include costs like transportation, building maintenance and early childhood screening which are all essential to a child's education. The current education funding formula also is not sufficient to fund education for our students with the greatest needs.

This legislation offers a path forward. It is built on a comprehensive set of recommendations that focus on four interconnected shifts:

1. Accounting for the full cost of education and sharing those costs more equitably
2. Tailoring instructional costs to student needs more directly
3. Ensuring greater predictability for municipalities
4. Requiring transparency and strategic management

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All these shifts are extremely important, but it is imperative that we have a formula requiring all municipalities – urban, suburban, and rural– to pay their fair share of education costs. Far too often, education funding is a constant battle at the local level with municipalities. Every community should invest in schools based on its actual financial capacity, not based on an outdated formula with no consequences or incentives.

The members of the Commission did not agree on every detail from the start. But through honest conversation and a shared commitment to Rhode Island’s children, we arrived at a consensus vision. That consensus is one of this legislation’s greatest strengths. I stand behind these recommendations alongside my fellow Commission members, and I urge this committee to recognize the significance of that unity.

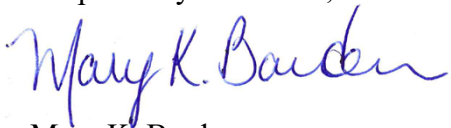
A critical component of that consensus is a shared understanding of how key recommendations must work together to avoid unintended consequences. In particular, this legislation and the Commission recommend that charter schools have equal access to state funds used to build and maintain schools, “housing aid.” This recommendation has implications for housing aid more broadly and the Commission also recommended increasing the total amount of aid. If charter schools are to have equal access to these funds, the total amount of funds need to be increased or there will be a negative impact on district public schools. The housing aid “pie” cannot stay the same if there are more schools seeking to access it. These changes need to be made together to ensure there is not less housing aid available to district public schools.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape how Rhode Island funds its public schools. Our students and communities cannot afford to wait.

I respectfully urge the members of this committee to move this legislation forward and take this important step toward building a school funding system that is fair, transparent, and effective for every child in Rhode Island.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your consideration of this important legislation. I welcome any questions and am happy to provide additional information.

Respectfully submitted,



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Executive Director
National Education Association Rhode Island