

April 28, 2026

Testimony from Jessica Purcell in Support of H7318, H7681, H7682, and H8476

Marvin L. Abney
Chairman, House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman Abney and Honorable Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Jessica Purcell and I live in Richmond, RI. I am a member of the Chariho School Committee, and I have two children who are 3rd and 6th grade students and future Chariho graduates. I am passionate about the importance of public education and advocate for our regional school district, which in turn supports the health of our community and benefits the future.

I am writing in support of several pieces of legislation that would provide meaningful and timely support to regional school districts like Chariho. **H7318** strengthens the regionalization bonus, recognizing the efficiencies and shared responsibilities that regional districts provide. **H7681** ensures the state fully funds transportation aid, one of the most significant and unavoidable costs for regional districts. **H7682** would allow Chariho more flexibility to pursue more cost-effective transportation solutions while still receiving reimbursement. **H8476** delivers critical, targeted relief to the Town of Richmond, helping to offset recent reductions in state aid.

The Chariho School Committee has approved resolutions in support of certain bills, which I have attached to this letter.

The regional school district of Chariho spans three towns and over 126 geographic square miles. We are the largest regional district in the state, and the only one consisting of three towns and formed by state legislation. We have multiple elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, one career-tech center, and one alternative learning academy. These schools provide educational opportunities to students that live in the district as well as to other students who travel here from out-of-district because they want to be part of Chariho's success.

Bus transportation is crucial to our regional district and is the safest way to ensure that children arrive at school on-time every day. The state funding formula awards our district with categorical transportation aid but we do not always receive full funding from the state, and the timelines of

developing our school budget do not line up with the state budget. **H7681** would help this problem by mandating that the state fully fund categorical transportation aid.

Related to the cost of transportation, while other districts pay the transportation costs for their students to attend Chariho, we pay the cost for transportation to other districts and to non-public schools within our region. As this cost nears \$1M, Chariho and other districts would benefit from increased flexibility in funding this category of transportation. The Chariho administration would benefit from increasing the pool of possible transportation providers outside of the state system because it could save money and increase efficiency of services. Our current contracted provider is located less than a mile from the main campus.

I also support **H7318**, which would increase the regionalization bonus to 6% of the state's share of the foundation education aid. Unlike the current version of this act, the 6% would be ongoing and continuous without an expiration date. The regional aspect of our school district is our greatest asset, and we are a unique example of how regionalization can have a positive impact among rural communities.

These amendments to The Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act would further the purpose of the act itself, and be a benefit to the students and residents of the Chariho region. The amendment to An Act Relating to Education – Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits would provide our administration and taxpayers with the ability to secure effective transportation in a necessary area at a lower cost.

These investments and flexibility from our state government would be appreciated and make a positive impact on students. Thank you for your time as you consider these bills that will improve funding to regional school districts and support our communities.

Respectfully,
Jessica Purcell
Richmond, RI



TBD
 School Committee Chairperson

 LAURA CHAPMAN
 School Committee Vice Chairperson

**Chariho Regional School District
 Office of the Superintendent**

455A Switch Road
 Wood River Junction, Rhode Island 02894

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GINA M. PICARD
 Superintendent of Schools

 MICHAEL COMELLA, Ed.D.
 Assistant Superintendent of Schools

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF RESTORING STATE EDUCATION FUNDING AID TO CHARIHO

WHEREAS: the Chariho Regional School District (“Chariho”) is a tri-town school district comprising Charlestown, Richmond, and Hopkinton, with each town receiving a unique amount of state aid based on student enrollment and the student success factor as determined by RIDE; and

WHEREAS: the Chariho Regional School Committee is committed to providing all students with a high-quality and accessible public education; and

WHEREAS: the Chariho Regional School Committee recognize that the RI State Legislature has been a partner in providing education aid and funding; and

WHEREAS: consistent, predictable, and adequate state investment in public education is critical to ensuring stability, equity, and opportunity for all students across Rhode Island communities while maintaining compliance with state laws;

WHEREAS: state funding and aid is essential to sustaining educational programs, maintaining reasonable class sizes, retaining trained staff, and ensuring safe school buildings; and

WHEREAS: Rhode Island law requires municipalities to meet Maintenance of Effort (MOE) by maintaining annual local education funding that meets or exceeds the previous fiscal year, but the state is not subject to the same requirement; and

WHEREAS: any shift in Chariho state aid impacts each town differently, which can cause disproportionate financial pressure in each town, and constrain the District’s ability to respond without cutting staff, services, and programs or increasing taxes; and

WHEREAS: the current projected decreases in state education aid for Charlestown (–\$59,430) and Richmond (–\$331,064) shift a greater financial burden onto local taxpayers in these two towns while constraining the District’s ability to respond to rising operational costs, contractual obligations, and student needs; and


NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that the Chariho Regional District School Committee

1. respectfully requests the Rhode Island General Assembly to restore and fully fund state education aid to Charlestown (\$59,430) and Richmond (\$331,064) to assist the Chariho Regional School District in providing a budget that can meet current student needs, inflationary pressures, and legal obligations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Charlestown Town Council, the Richmond Town Council, the Hopkinton Town Council, and state legislators of the Chariho Regional School District.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor of the State of Rhode Island.

This RESOLUTION shall take effect upon passage, WHERETO: The following bear witness:



 Laura Chapman (Apr 16, 2026 15:36:16 EDT)
 Laura Chapman, Vice Chairperson
 CHARIHO Regional District School Committee

4.16.26

 Date



 Angela Brasil, Clerk
 CHARIHO Regional District School Committee



Chariho Regional School District

Office of the Superintendent
455A Switch Road
Wood River Junction, Rhode Island 02894



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Chariho Regional School District Committee Resolution In Support of Full Funding of Categorical Transportation Aid As Outlined in RIGL § 16-7.2-i

WHEREAS: the regional incentive was promised to local districts when the Regional School Districts were formed; and

WHEREAS: the regional incentive was phased out in 2010 with the passage of the new funding formula; and

WHEREAS: Transportation Categorical Funds were provided to the Regional School Districts to partially offset the loss of the regional incentive by partially reimbursing the higher transportation costs of the regional districts; and

WHEREAS: the Regional School Districts have designed and implemented several innovative education programs that meet the learning needs of students; and

WHEREAS: the investment of resources in our Regional School Districts has yielded positive education results and innovative educational programs and services for students and adults that have been a wise investment of local and state resources; and

WHEREAS: it is necessary to ensure that students attending Regional School Districts continue to receive a high-quality public education and to reduce the burden on regional taxpayers; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the Chariho Regional School District Committee

1. Respectfully requests that Transportation Categorical Funds between the State and Regional Districts be fully funded in an amount equal to that intended under RIGL § 16-7.2-6(e) to protect the interests of regional school districts and advance the education mission of our schools;
2. Seeks the support of all School Committees, Town Councils, and Legislators that comprise the regional school districts regarding this matter of mutual interest to the schools and taxpayers of our regional districts.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor of the State of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island General Assembly, the Charlestown Town Council, the Richmond Town Council, the Hopkinton Town Council, and legislators of the Chariho Regional School District.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of the Resolution be sent as well to the Town Councils, School Committees, and Legislators of the regional districts of Bristol-Warren, Exeter-West Greenwich, and Foster-Glocester.



LOUISE D. DINSMORE
School Committee Chairperson

Chariho Regional School District
Office of the Superintendent

455A Switch Road
Wood River Junction, Rhode Island 02894

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GINA M. PICARD
Superintendent of Schools

MICHAEL COMELLA, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF 2025-H5204

Relating to Education – Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits

WHEREAS: the Chariho Regional School District ("Chariho") is a tri-town school district comprising Charlestown, Richmond, and Hopkinton. Chariho is the geographically largest regional school district in Rhode Island, spanning a geographic area of 126 square miles; and

WHEREAS: The Chariho Regional District School Committee has previously adopted a resolution of its support for full funding of transportation categorical aid funding (2025-H2501) between the state and regional school districts to partially offset the higher transportation costs of the geographically larger regional districts; and

WHEREAS: RIGL 16-21.1-1 (Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits – General Purposes) requires Chariho to provide bus transportation to pupils who attend nonpublic nonprofit schools; and

WHEREAS: the estimated cost for this service in FY25 is \$902,578.63 on out-of-district transportation, after an estimated credit for non-public offset of \$ 474,896.00 the total cost to Chariho is \$427,682.63 for an average cost of \$ 8,385.93 per student; and

WHEREAS: by contrast, the per pupil cost for each pupil being transported within Chariho is only \$ 1,456.00; and

WHEREAS: RIGL 16-21.1-8 (Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits – Statewide Transportation System for All Students) requires Chariho to utilize the statewide transportation system to meet this need; and

WHEREAS: Chariho employs contracted transportation service through Ocean State Transit, an in-district vendor located 0.8 miles away from the main campus; and

WHEREAS: 2025-H5204 would enable Chariho and every other school district to "utilize its own buses or vendors to transport students outside the district, at a lower cost than the statewide school transportation system," and submit these costs to the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to receive reimbursement from state funds whenever a district can provide transportation outside its community at a lower cost than the statewide transportation system;

WHEREAS: 2025-H5204 would promote economic efficiency as the statewide transportation system and school districts compete to lower costs, the original goal of the statewide transportation system;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that the Chariho Regional District School Committee

1. Respectfully requests that Chariho is permitted to utilize its own vendor to transport students outside of the district at a lower cost of the statewide transportation system.
2. Respectfully requests that Chariho should be permitted to submit these costs to the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to receive reimbursement from state funds.
3. Seeks the support of all regional School Committees, Town Councils of towns having regional school districts, and legislators representing towns served by regional school districts regarding this matter of mutual interest to the students, schools, and taxpayers of our school districts.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Charlestown Town Council, the Richmond Town Council, the Hopkinton Town Council, and legislators serving the towns of the Chariho Regional School District.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor of the State of Rhode Island; the Rhode Island General Assembly; and every RI Municipality, School Committee, and Town Council.

This RESOLUTION shall take effect upon passage, WHERETO: The following bear witness:


Louise D. Dinsmore
CHARIHO School Committee Chairperson


Angela A. Brasil
CHARIHO School Committee Clerk