



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
AFL - CIO

To: House Finance Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: May 26, 2026
Re: Charter Funding Holdback Adjustment
Testimony in **Support of H 8581** (Casey, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of H 8581, legislation that strengthens fiscal fairness in Rhode Island's education funding system by better accounting for the ongoing costs traditional public school districts retain when students enroll in charter schools.

Municipal school districts continue to bear substantial fixed and mandated costs regardless of enrollment changes. These obligations include debt service for school facilities, transportation systems, retiree health benefits, administrative infrastructure, specialized programs, high-cost special education services, and supports for students requiring intensive interventions. Many of these expenses do not decrease proportionally when enrollment shifts to charter schools.

The current statutory limitation capping reductions to local per-pupil charter funding at fourteen percent (14%) restricts districts' ability to fully account for these retained costs. Removing that limitation would more accurately reflect the financial responsibilities borne by traditional public schools and help ensure districts can sustain services for all students.

This issue is especially important because Rhode Island's municipal districts educate disproportionately higher numbers of students requiring intensive supports, including multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Districts also absorb the overwhelming majority of extraordinary special education costs. Statewide, charter schools serving more than 14,000 students receive only a small fraction of reimbursable high-cost special education funding compared with traditional districts serving comparable or smaller populations.

Education funding policies should reflect fiscal realities and avoid shifting greater burdens onto districts responsible for maintaining comprehensive educational systems and serving all students regardless of need.

H 8581 does not reduce educational opportunity. Rather, it promotes fairness by aligning funding more closely with actual district responsibilities and the costs of educating Rhode Island's highest-need students.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support H 8581.

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