



House Committee on Judiciary
Chairman Robert Craven

Re: Support for H7303 – Relating To Criminal Offenses – Threats And Extortion

February 27, 2024

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the National Education Association Rhode Island and our 12,000 members, we strongly support House Bill 7303, which would include superintendents, central office officials, school principals, and all other school employees in the definition of a “public official” under the criminal prohibition against making threats to public officials in RI General Laws § 11-42-4. We are thankful to Representative Noret for introducing this legislation.

There is a growing concern regarding the increasing hostility towards public servants, both elected and non-elected, that is being witnessed across the country and here in Rhode Island. This negative sentiment has permeated into the education sector, infiltrating our schools and democratic institutions, even manifesting itself during school committee meetings. It is disheartening to see our dedicated members, who have committed themselves to educating future generations, being subjected to threats and intimidation simply for upholding their professional standards.

Such behavior is not only appalling and undemocratic, but it is also completely unacceptable within the educational environment. Our members, along with all teachers and individuals mentioned in this legislation, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect at all times.

The shortage of teachers in Rhode Island is a pressing issue, with fewer individuals opting to pursue a career in education due in part to the hostile environment they may encounter. We urge you to support this legislation, as its passage into law would not only protect our educators but also give them some peace of mind when such instances occur.

Your consideration and support are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mary Barden, Executive Director
National Education Association Rhode Island