



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

To: House Labor Committee
From: Maribeth Calabro, President
Date: April 15, 2026
Re: **Right to Strike**
Testimony in Support of H 7042 (Bennett, et al.)

Maribeth K. Calabro

Chairperson, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 7042, which would grant teachers and municipal workers in Rhode Island the legal right to strike as a last resort in collective bargaining.

It is important to begin with a basic fact: public employee strikes are already heavily restricted across the United States.

Only about 11–12 states explicitly allow teachers to strike, while the remaining states prohibit it.

Even where strikes are legal, they are rare and tightly regulated, typically requiring mediation, notice periods, and other safeguards. In other words, granting the right to strike does not open the floodgates—it simply places Rhode Island in line with a minority of states that recognize workers need meaningful leverage when negotiations fail. Teacher strikes happen only when collective bargaining fails to produce an agreement. Most strikes are short in duration (median of 2 days) and resolve quickly.

Even more telling: 75% of recent teacher strikes occurred in states where strikes are illegal, demonstrating that when workers are denied legal pathways, conflicts still happen—but with less structure and accountability.

This underscores a key point: prohibiting strikes does not prevent them—it simply removes guardrails and incentives for fair negotiation.

In districts where strikes are legal, such as Illinois, educators have used that right responsibly—and often not just for wages, but for broader community benefits.

In Chicago, teachers have gone on strike over smaller class sizes, increased access to nurses, counselors, and social workers, investments in arts and student services, support for homeless students and affordable housing initiatives.

These strikes were widely understood as fights for student learning conditions and community stability, not just compensation.

356 SMITH STREET PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02908-3761 (401) 273-9800 FAX (401) 331-8815

• **Maribeth K. Calabro**, President • **Maria Manzi**, Executive Assistant • **Bridget McDonough**, Administrative Assistant •
• **Michael J. Mullane**, Field Representative • **James A. Parisi**, Field Representative •
• **Christopher Lambert**, Field Representative • **Jeremy Sencer**, Field Representative •
• **Sean Doyle**, Field Representative •



Similarly, recent strikes in Los Angeles, Denver, and Oakland focused on student-to-teacher ratios, mental health resources, and school funding equity.

Research shows these actions have led to improved school resources and better long-term outcomes without harming student performance.

States that allow strikes typically include safeguards such as:

1. Mandatory mediation
2. Cooling-off periods
3. Advance notice requirements

These frameworks encourage both sides to settle before a strike occurs. In fact, the existence of a legal strike option often prevents strikes by incentivizing good-faith negotiation.

Without that option, employers can delay or refuse meaningful bargaining—knowing workers have little recourse.

Rhode Island has already experienced the consequences of imbalance in bargaining power. During the administration of former Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza, educators faced prolonged contract disputes where workers had limited leverage to compel timely, fair agreements.

House Bill 7042 would not guarantee strikes; it would help prevent them by ensuring both sides come to the table with equal urgency and accountability.

This bill is about fairness, balance, and modernizing Rhode Island labor law.

It aligns Rhode Island with states that recognize workers' rights.

It creates structured, lawful pathways for resolving disputes.

It ensures strikes remain what they already are nationwide: a rare, last-resort tool when all else fails.

Most importantly, it strengthens—not weakens—the collective bargaining process, leading to better outcomes for workers, students, and communities.

I urge you to support House Bill 7042.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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