

Keith C. Catone, Ed.D., Ward 1 Representative, Cranston School Committee
61 Windsor Road
Cranston, RI 02905

Rhode Island House of Representatives
House Committee on State Government and Elections
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

March 10, 2026

Dear honorable members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections:

I am writing in my capacity as the Ward 1 Representative on the Cranston School Committee in support of **H7091, which would enable cities and towns to extend the right to vote to 16- and 17-year-olds in local school committee elections.**

As someone who has worked in the field of education for over 25 years, I have worked closely with youth leaders from across New England, including many here in the state of Rhode Island. As they are the only ones living the day-to-day experiences of being students, young people have unique perspectives and important ideas when it comes to improving our schools. And, they clearly have a lot at stake. **By affording young people who are at least 16 the right to vote for their school committee representatives, elected members will be held accountable to the constituency that matters the most in our schools: the students. As an elected school committee member, I would welcome this level of accountability.**

Students are the most talked about, but often the least consulted constituency in our public schools. As we have taken positive steps to improve civic education in our state, it is a logical next step to **expand our democratic practices so that we do not just talk about how to improve schools for young people without providing them a more meaningful voice.**

Supporting 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school committee elections will not only help hold the elected officials most directly responsible for public education accountable to the needs of students, it also will strengthen our democratic systems in Rhode Island. At a time when politics and elections might be alienating for many due to the division and vitriol we see too often playing out nationally, we can send a message to the young people of Rhode Island that we are invested in them, invested in our democracy, and invested in our collective future that will require their leadership and wisdom.

Respectfully,



Keith Catone, Ed.D.