



April 8, 2026

The Honorable Hanna Gallo
Chair, Senate Committee on Education
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: S2216

I am writing on behalf of the National Education Association of Rhode Island and our 12,000 members to express our opposition to S 2216, legislation that would establish a comprehensive criminal and employment background check procedure for all school employees.

We share the goal of ensuring student safety with the sponsors of this bill. Maintaining high standards for educator quality and protecting students are fundamental priorities for our union. However, we must oppose this legislation as drafted because it is unworkable in practice, raises serious legal and privacy concerns, and ultimately fails to achieve its intended purpose.

First, this bill creates a significant unfunded mandate on local school districts. Human resource departments are not equipped to conduct extensive, multi-decade employment investigations or to verify records across multiple jurisdictions, including out-of-state employers, unions, licensing bodies, and tax documentation. The legislation assumes a level of staffing, legal expertise, and administrative infrastructure that simply does not exist in most districts. Without dedicated funding, clear guidance, or centralized support, this requirement would divert already limited resources away from classrooms and student services.

Second, the bill requires applicants to waive confidentiality rights and authorize access to personnel records as a condition of employment consideration. This provision raises serious concerns regarding privacy and fairness. Personnel files may contain sensitive, unsubstantiated, or unrelated information that should not be used in hiring decisions. Requiring applicants to relinquish these protections exposes them to undue scrutiny and creates potential legal liability for both employees and school districts.

Third, the legislation establishes inconsistent and inequitable standards for applicants. Individuals with no prior experience, those with long-term in-state employment, and those coming from out-of-state backgrounds would each face different levels of verification and scrutiny. This lack of uniformity risks creating arbitrary outcomes, delays in hiring, and barriers to attracting qualified educators, rather than improving student safety.

Finally, the bill lacks clarity around accountability and liability. It does not clearly define responsibility when information is delayed, incomplete, disputed, or unavailable. This ambiguity places school districts at increased legal risk while failing to provide a clear enforcement framework or due process protections for applicants.

NEARI remains committed to working collaboratively with policymakers to develop thoughtful, effective approaches that enhance student safety while respecting privacy, fairness, and the operational realities faced by school districts. Unfortunately, S 2216, as currently written, does not meet that standard. For these reasons, we respectfully urge the committee to oppose S 2216 in its current form.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Lucini".

Alexander Lucini
Government Relations Director, NEARI