



To: Senate Education Committee
From: Maribeth Calabro, President
Date: April 8, 2026
Re: **PPSD Local Control**
Testimony in Support of 2026-S 2526 (Senator Bell, et. al.)

Thank you for the opportunity to write to you today on the future governance of Providence Public Schools, S 2526 PPSD Local Control. As a 31-year educator and former PTU president I am here to urge a thoughtful and timely transition from state control under RIDE back to local leadership. After seven years of oversight from RIDE, it is time to bring local control back to Providence. Returning control over the schools must be grounded in evidence of system stabilization, transparency, consistent communication, collaboration, and sustained community engagement.

Since state intervention began in 2019, Providence Public Schools have undergone substantial challenges and changes including a global pandemic, significant shifts in fiscal strength, academic programming changes, and operational systems. While challenges persist, the district has established more consistent budgeting practices, and improved data monitoring systems. These developments signal a district that is no longer in freefall, but instead on a path toward stability.

Sustained improvement now depends on transitioning from external control to internal accountability. A return to local governance, paired with clear benchmarks and institutional transparency will allow Providence to maintain the progress that the district has realized while building long-term capacity and the growing momentum of student growth.

Providence Public Schools are serving fewer students today than they were at the start of state control. Enrollment has declined steadily over the past seven years due to a combination of demographic shifts, family mobility, and increased access to saturated charter expansion. Providence Public Schools have lost over 3,000 students since 2020, nearly matching the growth in charter enrollment, with about 28% of all Providence students now attending charter schools’ unmistakable evidence that we are at past our economic point with parallel school systems.

This trend has significant implications including reduced per-pupil funding, straining district resources and impacting services and support for our most vulnerable student demographics MLL students and students identified as having special needs.

Our School Board, in collaboration with a strong municipal leadership team, are best positioned to respond strategically to these changes. Decisions about maximizing our newer schools, increasing program offerings, and growing our community partnerships must be informed by neighborhood-level knowledge and direct engagement with families. A locally governed system can more effectively adapt to enrollment realities while preserving equitable access and educational quality.

Local governance is critical to maximizing the once-in-a-generation investment we have made in our school’s infrastructure and school buildings. Community stakeholders should have a direct voice in how these new spaces are used, programmed, and sustained. The success of this effort will depend not just on construction, but on thoughtful, locally driven stewardship starting with the community and our hybrid School Board.

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Providence has lost over six hundred educators since 2019, a level of attrition that has deeply impacted instructional quality and school stability. This loss reflects not only workforce trends, but also broader concerns about working conditions, morale, and trust in leadership.

Recruitment and retention are inherently local challenges. Educators are more likely to stay in a district where they feel connected to the community and have confidence in leadership. Local control enables more responsive, relationship-based strategies to rebuild and sustain a strong educator workforce.

Providence's diversity is one of its greatest strengths. Its students come from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Effective strategic planning must reflect this diversity and be shaped by those closest to the schools.

State intervention brought urgency and focus, but long-term success requires local ownership. A community-driven approach will foster trust, alignment, and sustainability.

The return to local control should be systematic, transparent and should include:

- Establishing clear performance benchmarks tied to academic, financial, and operational goals,
- Implementing a phased return of authority over a defined timeline,
- Adequate funding by state and municipalities; no more level funding,
- Ensuring transparent public reporting and community engagement throughout the process.

This approach balances accountability with empowerment, ensuring that progress is not only preserved but strengthened.

Providence Public Schools stand at a pivotal moment.

The district has achieved a measure of stability, is navigating declining enrollment, is investing in its physical infrastructure at an unprecedented level and must urgently rebuild its educator workforce.

The next phase of improvement requires local leadership. Leaders who are deeply connected to the community and accountable to the families and students they serve.

Returning Providence Public Schools to local control is not a step backward. It is a necessary step toward a more responsive, sustainable, and community-centered system of public education.

Thank you for your time and consideration.