

Pawtucket School Department
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Office of the Superintendent
Randy A. Buck
Superintendent of Schools

April 7, 2026

To: Chairwoman Hanna M. Gallo
Senate Committee on Education

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill S 2649

Dear Chairwoman Gallo and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing in strong opposition to Senate Bill S 2649, relating to in-district access to open school seats.

As Superintendent of the Pawtucket School Department, I deeply value the intent behind expanding access and opportunity for students. However, as written, this legislation would have significant unintended consequences for urban school districts like ours, ultimately undermining equity, stability, and our ability to strategically serve all students.

While the bill seeks to ensure that open seats are made available across schools within a district, it does not fully account for the complex realities of district operations, resource allocation, and student needs.

First, this policy risks destabilizing school communities. In urban districts, schools are intentionally designed and resourced based on enrollment patterns, student needs, and programmatic offerings. Opening seats across all schools without careful local control could result in uneven enrollment shifts, disrupting staffing, class sizes, and the continuity of services for students.

Second, the proposal presents equity concerns. While framed as increasing access, in practice, open enrollment systems often advantage families with greater access to information, transportation, and flexibility. This can inadvertently widen gaps for students from historically underserved communities, including multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and families facing economic challenges.

Third, the bill does not sufficiently address transportation. Without dedicated funding or clear provisions, districts may face increased logistical and financial burdens. More importantly, students who lack reliable transportation may not be able to take advantage of these opportunities, further exacerbating inequities.

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Fourth, this legislation limits local decision-making. School districts are best positioned to understand the needs of their students and communities. Mandating a uniform approach to seat allocation reduces the ability of districts to implement thoughtful, strategic enrollment practices aligned to long-term improvement efforts.

Finally, as Pawtucket moves forward with critical initiatives, including the planning of a new high school and the redesign of key programs, maintaining stability and intentional alignment across schools is essential. Policies that introduce unpredictability in enrollment could undermine this work at a pivotal time.

We fully support expanding opportunity for students. However, this must be done in a way that is equitable, adequately resourced, and informed by the realities of district operations. I respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider this legislation and engage district leaders in developing solutions that truly advance access without unintended harm.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Randy A. Buck

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