



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
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To: Senate Education Committee
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative
Date: May 13, 2026
Re: Network Charter School Restrictions
Testimony in **Support of S2784** (Murray, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of S2784, legislation that restricts the expansion of network charter schools in Rhode Island and strengthens accountability within the state's charter school system.

Rhode Island's current charter cap structure is functionally ineffective because network charter organizations are counted as a single charter under state law regardless of how many schools they operate. As a result, large charter management organizations have been able to expand significantly despite the appearance of statutory limitations.

For example, the seven Achievement First schools operating in Rhode Island are currently counted as only one charter under the statewide cap. This loophole undermines the purpose of the cap and allows continued expansion of large network charter systems without meaningful statewide guardrails, transparency, or public accountability.

After thirty years of charter expansion, Rhode Island now operates one of the most fragmented public education systems in the Northeast relative to its size. The state serves approximately 140,000 students yet operates more than 60 education entities, including 24 charter LEAs with separate governance systems, administrative structures, operational overhead, and facilities. Continued network charter expansion intensifies fiscal pressure on municipalities and diverts additional resources away from neighborhood public schools.

First and foremost, network charter expansion has a deeply negative financial impact on sending districts, many of which are already among the poorest and most underserved communities in Rhode Island. Every dollar redirected into expanding parallel charter systems is a dollar unavailable for student supports, school staffing, transportation, mental health services, special education programs, and neighborhood public schools already struggling to meet growing student needs. These are not abstract budget adjustments — they are real losses with real consequences for students, educators, and communities.

The original legislative intent of charter schools was to create innovation laboratories within public education systems that could share best practices and improve outcomes for all students. Rhode Island law itself describes charter schools as “vanguards” and “laboratories” intended to strengthen public education through innovation, research, accountability, and pilot programs. Charter schools were originally envisioned by the American Federation of Teachers and Al Shanker as small-scale, teacher-led innovation models designed to strengthen public education systems through collaboration and shared learning.

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That original vision has been replaced by the continued expansion of large network charter organizations operating parallel systems that compete with neighborhood public schools for limited public funding. Rhode Island is no longer adding niche innovation models — it is expanding a separate system.

Worse still, many network charter organizations are governed through out-of-state management structures with limited local accountability. Rhode Island public education dollars should remain invested in Rhode Island classrooms and communities rather than being transferred out-of-state to parent management organizations and administrative structures that prioritize continued expansion and organizational growth.

S2784 appropriately re-centers the original purpose of charter schools by limiting continued expansion of large network operators and preserving opportunities for genuinely innovative, community-based educational models.

Rhode Island should invest in the public schools that serve all children — schools rooted in our communities, accountable to local families, and reflective of our shared commitment to educational equity and justice — rather than continuing the unchecked growth of large parallel charter networks.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support S2784.

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