

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to write to you today. My name is Adam Genest, and I am a public school music educator, union member, and tax payer in Rhode Island. I am writing about the growing challenges facing our schools, our students, and our communities.

Across Rhode Island, educators are being asked to do more with fewer resources. Staffing shortages continue to strain our schools at every level. In Pawtucket, our district is struggling to fill teaching positions, special education roles, counseling positions, paraprofessional jobs, bus driver positions, and support staff vacancies. Our school alone this year has had 2 vacancies in math as well as a vacancy in Science with zero instruction all year. These shortages directly impact students' learning and educators' ability to provide individualized attention and consistent support.

Special education services are under increasing pressure. Students with disabilities deserve legally required and high-quality services, yet many schools lack the staffing, time, and resources necessary to meet student needs effectively. Educators are managing larger caseloads, delayed evaluations, and reduced intervention time, while families are often left frustrated navigating systems already stretched too thin.

Transportation costs have also become a major burden on school budgets. Rising costs for busing services, out-of-district placements, and transportation contracts are consuming dollars that would otherwise support classroom instruction, student programming, and essential services. Districts are forced to make impossible choices between balancing budgets and maintaining opportunities for students. Our school can't even participate in field trips because of the rising costs and the lack of funding.

At the same time, student needs continue to grow. Schools need more counselors, social workers, psychologists, interventionists, multilingual learner supports, and behavioral health resources. Students are arriving at school carrying the weight of housing instability, food insecurity, mental health challenges, and interrupted learning. Educators cannot meet these challenges alone without meaningful investment in student support. Having a small pool of support staff prevents our students from receiving the help they need to succeed.

Budget pressures have pushed many districts into a cycle of cuts and reductions. Larger class sizes are becoming increasingly common, limiting the ability of teachers to provide individualized instruction and build strong relationships with students. Programs in the arts, libraries, world languages, career and technical education, extracurricular activities, and intervention services are often the first to be reduced or eliminated when budgets tighten. These are not extras. They are essential parts of a well-rounded public education. Being a music educator and after-school club advisor for a couple of clubs, I am seeing multiple avenues of strain that prevent our students from growing as individuals.

Student mobility is another growing challenge affecting districts across Rhode Island. High rates of housing instability and family movement create disruptions in learning, increase the need for

interventions, and place additional demands on already stretched school systems. Schools need stable funding structures that recognize and respond to these realities.

We must also acknowledge the impact that charter school expansion has had on local public schools and communities. When funding follows students out of district schools, local districts are often left with fixed costs that do not disappear. Public schools still must maintain buildings, transportation systems, special education services, and staffing obligations even as funding declines. This creates deeper financial strain on traditional public schools serving the vast majority of Rhode Island students.

Charter expansion has also contributed to increased segregation and inequity in some communities, while intensifying competition for limited educational resources. Public education should strengthen communities, not divide them or destabilize neighborhood schools that serve all students regardless of need.

Rhode Island students deserve fully funded public schools with manageable class sizes, strong student supports, equitable special education services, and stable staffing. Educators want to continue serving our students and communities, but we need policymakers to invest in sustainable solutions rather than asking schools to absorb continual cuts and growing demands.

I urge you to prioritize investments in public education that strengthen neighborhood schools, support educators, and ensure every student has access to the opportunities they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Adam Genest

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