

To: Senate Education Committee

From: David Upegui, Ph.D. |

Date: May 11, 2026

Subject: Support for S2787 — Establishing a Charter School Moratorium

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for **S2787**. My perspective is grounded in my history as a graduate and 16-year veteran teacher of Central Falls High School, a recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, and my role as an Adjunct Professor of Education at Brown University. My doctoral research specifically focused on the intersection of Science Education and Social Justice, a lens I apply to the current state of charter expansion in Rhode Island.

1. The Reality of Systematic Exclusion

While charter schools often market themselves as centers of innovation, my experience in Central Falls reveals a persistent pattern of "hyper-segregation". In 2022, data showed that the Segue Institute for Learning served a student body where only 4% had IEPs, compared to 17.4% at the traditional Calcutt Middle School just one block away.

Furthermore:

- **Severe Needs:** Charter schools frequently do not serve children designated with severe or profound special education categories.
- **Language Learners:** Significant populations, such as "newcomers" (new English Language Learners), are often educated in their totality by traditional districts, as they lack representation in many charter settings.
- **Academic Performance:** Despite these exclusionary selection practices, some charters have struggled with proficiency; for instance, Segue was one of only three middle schools in the state with single-digit math proficiency levels in 2019.

2. Fiscal Stewardship and Taxpayer Waste

A moratorium is a necessary fiscal guardrail against what I have previously termed "taxpayer money squandering". In the urban core, we see demonstrative waste through administrative redundancies:

- **Superintendent Costs:** In 2022, the superintendent pay per student at a single charter school was over \$509, compared to approximately \$58.90 in Central Falls and \$21.50 in Pawtucket.
- **Redundancy:** Central Falls voters have already approved and secured funds for a new, fully accessible high school building. Expanding parallel high schools in the same square mile is redundant and ignores long-term utilization of public assets.

3. Impact on Teacher Human Capital

Every district in Rhode Island is currently facing a teacher shortage. Expanding parallel systems exacerbates this by creating more open positions without increasing the pool of qualified educators, causing districts to act "like parasites" toward one another regarding hiring bonuses and salaries. Moreover, many "innovations" proposed by charters—such as "Teaching Academies"—already exist and succeed within traditional districts like Central Falls.

Conclusion

As the philosopher Paulo Freire cautioned, we must be wary of actions that attempt to undo oppressive conditions but only serve to re-inscribe the very patterns we're looking to break. Rhode Island has developed a parallel system that too often treats children as products rather than human beings.

S2787 provides the essential pause needed to ensure our educational system serves the great majority of children—especially those who need access the most—rather than continuing a path of unsustainable competition and segregation.

Respectfully,

David Upegui, Ph.D.