

May 12, 2026

Dear RI Senate Education Committee:

My name is Deborah Muther. I am an elementary school teacher with Providence Public Schools and I live in Exeter, RI.

I am writing to urge you to support S2787, which bars the Council from granting approval to create or expand a charter school beginning operations in 26-27 school year and bars the state from approving or appropriating funds to a new charter school not approved before July 1, 2025. In addition, I ask that during the moratorium, Rhode Island lawmakers required the Department of Education to demonstrate that all public schools are serving students with disabilities equitably and sustainably.

Rhode Island's public education system has a legal and moral obligation to provide comprehensive services for students with special needs. Expanding charter schools without stronger accountability and transparency risks deepening inequities for students who require the most intensive educational support.

This matters because when charter schools enroll lower proportions of students with intensive disabilities, traditional district schools are left responsible for a disproportionately high-cost and high-needs population. National research and reporting have repeatedly identified this pattern. Studies analyzing charter school enrollment trends and special education access have found persistent concerns regarding equitable enrollment, service delivery, and funding responsibilities for students with disabilities.

Before approving additional charter seats or expanding existing charter networks, Rhode Island should require:

- Transparent reporting comparing charter and district enrollment of students with disabilities, including severity of need and service intensity.
- Independent analysis of whether charter schools are equitably serving students requiring high-cost supports.
- Full fiscal impact studies examining how charter expansion affects district capacity to provide special education services.
- Clear accountability standards to ensure charter schools do not disproportionately counsel out or fail to retain students with disabilities.

Public education works best when every school shares responsibility for educating every child. Traditional public school districts cannot remain financially stable if they are expected to serve the highest-need students while resources continue to shift away through unchecked charter expansion.

All students, especially students with disabilities, deserve more than slogans about "choice." They deserve stable funding, qualified staff, comprehensive supports, and schools that are fully prepared to educate them - not systems that incentivize uneven enrollment patterns or fragmented service delivery.

I urge Rhode Island policymakers to pause charter expansion and prioritize strengthening the public school infrastructure that serves all students, especially those with the greatest educational needs.

Sincerely,

Deborah Muther  
21 Silas Hill Way  
Exeter, RI 02822  
401-649-0106