

**From:** [Rodrigues, Heather](#)  
**To:** [SLegislation](#)  
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## S2787 - Charter Moratorium

My name is Heather Rodrigues and as a resident of Valley Falls in Cumberland I have lived through the consequences of rapid charter expansion with little regard for the community it's built in. When two mayoral academies, including a new high school were built in the Valley, within a half mile of our elementary school it became an unmitigated disaster for not just our community, but for CF and Lincoln as the traffic ground to an absolute stop.

Because no one stopped to think about the impact.

The mayoral academy put so much stress on bus availability that our town enforced the distance requirements for the first time in years, and my twins were forced off the bus, with all of the other students in the neighborhood. This tripled the number of students in the car drop off and pick up lanes.

The issue is that for years our school had begged parents to utilize the buses because of the school's location on a main road, and the potential for massive traffic jams, accidents, and risk to students.

It was weeks of chaos. The added strain of the mayoral high school dismissing at the same time, in addition to the mayoral middle school and our public school, meant that my community was held hostage by the chaos. It began taking me upwards of 40 minutes just to get through the traffic to approach the school. Desperate commuters, trying to get out of the Valley were trapped, late to work or to pick up their own kids, began employing increasingly dangerous methods, like jumping curbs, driving around buses. I myself jumped in front of a car to shield a group of walkers and a crossing guard from a frustrated driver trying to drive around illegally.

Cumberland had no choice but to act. Installing police officers to direct traffic to protect kids. Protect them from our decisions. Because we opened corporate charters and alternative public schools without thinking through the consequences. The saddest part is that the only thing that brought any order was the selflessness of BF Norton teachers who gave up their parking lot, parking down the street at CVS or the bank, so that their employee lot could be used as parent pick up and drop off.

We have allowed corporate charters to grow unchecked and it has been a disaster for our cities and towns. We have allowed precious taxpayer dollars to be stripped from our kids and divided without truly evaluating the consequences.

As a Pawtucket teacher I have seen the catastrophic consequences of unregulated corporate charters that think they can carve up our districts for profits for their corporate boards and billionaire backers.

Last year Pawtucket sent over \$7.5 million to charters, and this year we are facing a \$7.5 million deficit.

We have allowed a system to be created that has ballooned our costs. Because we have to pay for waste and redundancy. And now we have 64 school districts in Rhode Island. 64 superintendents. 64 curriculum directors. 64 transportation plans.

How could we allow this to happen? How can you allow this to continue? And Segue has already announced that they have plans to invade Pawtucket in the next few years. Because they think you won't put Rhode Island cities and towns first. Because they think you will support their corporate agenda over our kids.

So now all the districts are facing major budget deficits because we're spending twice as much money on a fraction of students in order to get no actual improvement in student outcomes. Charters and mayoral academies don't even outperform their sending districts in state testing. In the case of Cumberland, the mayoral academy critically underperforms the local public schools. Millions wasted for nothing.

Not to mention that we are midway through a once in a generation build of public schools. Why on earth did we invest all that money just to divest our kids and neighborhoods of the resources necessary to maintain their education? Why did you build these new buildings just to create dualing school districts siphoning resources away from our students?

We have created a situation in which our districts face devastating budget shortfalls; the only option for the communities is to raise taxes on their constituents. Because we have 64 school districts to fund.

Make no mistake. You have two choices.

You can vote for the moratorium and pause the expansion of charters. Give our state the opportunity to truly evaluate the long-term consequences of expansion.

Or you can vote to increase the property taxes of every Rhode Islander. Because any vote against the charter moratorium is a vote to increase taxes.

Vote for the moratorium - give our state the time it deserves to make the right decisions for our kids.

Thank you for your time.

Heather Rodrigues

