

**My name is Judith Dixon. I am speaking in support of senate bill 2787: Charter School Moratorium and Cap Reduction.**

I am a Speech/Language Pathologist of 27 years.

I am deeply concerned about the impact of the ongoing charter expansion on special needs students. I work with autistic students who have high needs and require enhanced staffing to be safe and learn. In large groups, my students become distracted and dysregulated so their class size is capped at 10. Although my students are in a small, self-contained class, they are part of a larger public school community so have opportunities to interact with peers. To my knowledge, none of the charter schools in RI have any programming for students like mine.

I recently researched the largest charter network in the state, Achievement First (AF). Achievement First has 7 schools in RI (interestingly under our current cap, Achievement First is only considered to be one charter despite having 7 schools.) In my research, I could not find evidence that Achievement First has any small, specialized classrooms. In addition, there was no mention of extended school year services, a vital part of programming for special needs students who may significantly regress if they have a long summer break.

In the FY 2026 Education Aid report, it was shown that charters in RI barely use the special state funding which provides reimbursement to districts for students with significant needs. RI charters enroll 14,159 students and they have so successfully excluded high-need special education students that they only have a little over \$34,000 in reimbursable expenses! By comparison, Cranston has \$1.3 million for a smaller number of students at 9,712.

Those of us who work in education repeatedly hear the words “there is no money”. When we ask for resources for our students (“*there is no money*”) or a cost of living raise (“*there is no money*”), so why are we spending money on this inequitable system? RI already has 64 Local Education Authorities with 64 Superintendents, 64 human resource departments, 64 central office staffs, etc. to serve only 8 cities and 31 towns. In addition, RI’s education dollars are leaving the state to fund the parent organizations of charters such as AF and Excel Academy. In 2024 according to a ProPublica report, the CEO of AF made almost \$500,000. Is this a good use of our education dollars when some of our neediest students are being left out?

For at least a decade prior to the 1975 passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142)*, people with disabilities and their families fought to be included in their neighborhood schools; now we are building a system that excludes them again.

I ask you to please support this bill and stand with special needs students and their families.

**References**

*RI FY 2026 Education Aid Report. (n.d.).*

<https://www.rilegislature.gov/sfiscal/Budget%20Analyses/SFO%20FY2026%20Governor%27s%20Budget%20Education%20Aid.pdf>

*History of Special Education:*

(n.d.). <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/IDEA-History>

*ProPublica 2024 Report on Achievement First*

<https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/651203744>