



# International CHARTER SCHOOL

Teaching in the languages of our community:  
English, español, and Português.

May 12, 2026

Re: [Senate Bill S 2787](#)

Chairperson Gallo and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I have spent all but a few years of my career since 2004 working in special education at the International Charter School in Pawtucket, RI. I bring an additional 6 years of experience supporting multilingual learners in the South Kingstown School Department. My experience in both types of settings - charter public and traditional public - has allowed me the opportunity to learn so much from our families in Rhode Island that bring unique and individualized strengths, needs, experiences and perspectives. Currently, I serve the International Charter School community as the Student Services Director, working daily with families of students with disabilities and multilingual learners across our diverse school community. I respectfully urge you to oppose Senate Bill S 2787.

Rhode Island must prioritize the needs of its growing population of multilingual learners and its most vulnerable students. This principle should guide our policy decisions, our resource allocation and our vision for public education. In Rhode Island, multilingual learners now make up a significant and growing share of the student population - over 13% statewide with much higher concentrations in urban districts. At the same time, the number of students requiring special education services continues to rise, with approximately 16% of students identified as having disabilities. These trends underscore the urgency of expanding access to high-quality and rigorous educational options. At a time when these student populations are increasing, we should be expanding access to high-quality, responsive educational options - not limiting them.

At its core, this bill places a multi-year moratorium on the creation and expansion of charter public schools. While I understand the intent to strengthen oversight and ensure quality, this approach risks unintentionally restricting access to some of the most responsive and inclusive educational environments available to students who have historically been marginalized and underserved.

For many students with disabilities and multilingual learners, traditional systems have not always met their needs effectively. Families often seek out charter public schools because they offer innovative models, smaller learning environments and a greater ability to tailor instruction, language supports and social-emotional services. Our charter public schools can serve as critical partners in delivering specialized programming that is culturally and linguistically responsive - exactly the kind of environments our growing multilingual population and most vulnerable learners need.

By halting expansion, this bill effectively closes the door to students who are currently waiting for access to such programs. In my role, I regularly meet families searching for the right fit - a public



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option that understands their child's IEP, honors their home language and provides individualized support. As the number of multilingual learners continues to grow - particularly in the urban core - the demand for these responsive environments is increasing. A moratorium reduces these options at precisely the moment they are most needed.

Additionally, limiting the number of charter public schools statewide may create increased competition for limited seats, disproportionately impacting students with higher needs. In Rhode Island, achievement gaps remain significant for both multilingual learners and students with disabilities, indicating that many students are still not being adequately served in traditional settings. When access is constrained, it is often students requiring specialized services - those with complex disabilities or developing English proficiency - who are left with the fewest viable options. This outcome runs counter to the goal of prioritizing our most vulnerable learners.

The bill also introduces additional layers of local approval for certain charter models. While community input is important, this process may unintentionally amplify inequities. Students with disabilities and multilingual learners do not always have the same political voice or advocacy power at the municipal level. Their access to educational opportunity should not depend on processes that may be influenced by factors unrelated to student need.

Our students deserve a system that expands - not limits - opportunity. Rhode Island must prioritize the needs of its growing population of multilingual learners and its most vulnerable students. For students with disabilities and multilingual learners, access to the right educational environment can be transformative. Access can shape not only academic success, but overall life outcomes. At a time when these populations are increasing, we should be working intentionally to expand access to high-quality, responsive educational options, not restrict them. Policy decisions must center those with the greatest needs and ensure that opportunity grows alongside our students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Katie Nersthemer

International Charter School  
Student Services Director