

From: [Wendy Ann Berard](#)
To: [SLegislation](#)
Subject: Charter School Moratorium
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Rhode Island has created a fragmented parallel school system that places growing fiscal pressure on municipalities and diverts resources away from neighborhood public schools that serve the overwhelming majority of all students including students with special needs and circumstances charter schools do not hold a priority.

Rhode Island now operates more than 60 education entities, including 24 charter LEAs, each with separate administrative and operational costs. Rhode Island also has one of the highest concentrations of charter enrollment in the Northeast relative to the size of our public education system. Despite serving only about 140,000 students statewide, Rhode Island enrolls approximately 13,000 students in charter schools — more than Connecticut, which serves over 500,000 students statewide.

At the same time, we, as a state, lack the fiscal guardrails used in neighboring states like Massachusetts, which limits charter tuition to 9% of district spending in most communities.

The impact has fallen disproportionately on urban core communities including Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket, where charter expansion has shifted students — and funding — away from district schools that continue to serve the highest-need student populations.

According to RI House Fiscal FY2025 data:

- Providence: 27.6% of resident students attend charter/state schools
- Central Falls: 40.8%
- Pawtucket: 22.8%
- Woonsocket: 11%

Rhode Island is also experiencing declining enrollment while simultaneously making a once-in-a-generation investment in school construction and modernization. Expanding additional parallel systems while enrollment declines raises serious concerns about long-term planning, utilization of public assets, fiscal sustainability and even more importantly, the care of the greater number of students needing a solid foundation that won't turn them away due to personal issues and disabilities beyond their control. Our public education system is a solid rock for many students. A legacy, a strong foundation where they can turn to any staff member, wholeheartedly, with trust, feeling safe in the arms of our public schools and our staff

members.

Charter schools were originally envisioned by the American Federation of Teachers and Al Shanker as small-scale innovation centers designed to share best practices and strengthen public education systems. Instead, Rhode Island has developed a permanent parallel system that has failed to deliver broad improvements for all students. Rhode Island is no longer adding niche options — it is expanding a parallel charter system that has been offered by billionaires using tax dollars to support its own purpose and gain.

Recent events have also raised growing concerns about accountability and local control. Municipalities have filed litigation regarding the proposed De La Comunidad charter application, alleging violations of state law and local approval requirements.

At the same time, educator-led innovation proposals within traditional public schools have struggled to receive support. In 2020, the Providence Teachers Union proposed a dual-language community school model in Providence that was ultimately rejected, while similar concepts are now being advanced through charter expansion outside the district system. I ask, "Why?"

The following issues are of concern as we are already feeling the impact charter schools are having on such topics.

- special education services are in decline
- student supports are becoming scarce
- budget pressures are a huge concern
- program cuts will continue to impact students first-hand
- the impact charter expansion has had on local schools and communities will continue to decline the required services our students need on a daily basis

I have experienced what charter schools can and cannot do through a family member who had enrolled her son for a year, then re-enrolled him back into the RI public school system, due to a lack of support and qualified teaching staff. What will Rhode Island do when charter schools have created such a deficit in public education that there are no longer enough funds to support it? When the charter schools "push back" the students they do not want to accept and there is no system left to support them? I cannot even begin to explain the lengthy path these students will face nor do I want to imagine that road for any student. PLEASE listen to educators who have a front row seat in understanding the impact this will have on, not only our school system, but also our first priority. OUR KIDS and our future.

***Sincerely,
Mrs. Wendy Berard
M. Virginia Cunningham Elementary School
Grade One MLL Teacher***

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."