

From: [Richard Willette](#)
To: [SLegislation](#)
Subject: RE: Support for Legislation Establishing a Temporary Pause on Charter School Expansion
Date: Monday, May 11, 2026 1:23:36 PM

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Dear Education Committee Members,

I am writing to you today as a Cranston Public Schools educator, who has worked in education for the past 30 years, to express my strong support for the proposed legislation to create a temporary pause on charter school expansion and a reduction in the statewide cap. After thirty years of unchecked growth, Rhode Island has created a fragmented, parallel education system that is no longer sustainable for our municipalities or our neighborhood public schools.

Rhode Island currently operates over 60 separate education entities for a student population of only 140,000. The scale of this duplication is staggering. While Connecticut serves over 500,000 students, Rhode Island actually enrolls more students in charter schools—approximately 13,000. This administrative bloat diverts precious tax dollars away from classrooms and into redundant operational costs.

Unlike Massachusetts, which protects local districts by limiting charter tuition to 9% of spending in most communities, Rhode Island lacks the fiscal guardrails necessary to protect our urban core. The impact on our most vulnerable communities is reaching a breaking point:

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

In my 10 years of experience at Western Hills Middle School as a guidance counselor, I have seen firsthand how this fiscal pressure manifests: we are currently struggling with staffing shortages, increasing class sizes, and an outdated, deteriorating school building.

When funding follows a student to a charter school, the "stranded costs" of maintaining our school buildings and essential programs don't disappear—they simply weigh more heavily on the students who remain.

Furthermore, expanding a parallel system while statewide enrollment is declining—and while we are making historic investments in school construction—is fiscally irresponsible. We should be focusing on maximizing our public assets, not diluting them.

It is also concerning that educator-led innovation within our traditional system is often overlooked. In 2020, the Providence Teachers Union's proposal for a dual-language community school was rejected, yet similar models are now being advanced through charter expansion. We should be empowering our existing educators to innovate within the system that serves the overwhelming majority of our children.

This legislation is not an "anti-charter" bill; it is a common-sense "pause" to evaluate long-term sustainability, equity, and accountability. We must ensure that the original vision of charter schools as small-scale innovation centers—not permanent parallel systems—is restored.

I urge you to support this legislation and prioritize the stability of the neighborhood schools that serve all our children.

Sincerely,
Rick Willette
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