

**From:** [Robert Stewart](#)  
**To:** [S Legislation](#); [Sen. Gallo, Hanna M.](#)  
**Cc:** [Sen. Murray, Melissa A.](#)  
**Subject:** SB 2787 Charter School Cap and Moratorium  
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May 13, 2026

Dear Chair Gallo and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I write in support of [Senate Bill 2787](#) to study charter financing, to study the fiscal impacts on sending districts, and to evaluate the direction we should take to provide the best education for all our students.

### **Fiscal Consequences**

Woonsocket Education Department (WED) has been financially harmed from the creation and dramatic expansion of RISE Prep, which began with 40-50 students and is expected to be at over 900 by 2027. RISE Prep began as a Mayoral charter with support from former Mayor Lisa Baldelli-Hunt, who served as President of the Board of Directors of RISE Prep.

Rise's expansion has shifted significant financial resources away from WED's existing public schools to RISE. WED has explained that it has shifted approximately \$350,000 to RISE and is expected to shift more than a million dollars to RISE by 2027. The financial shift is expected to increase as RISE enrollment grows under the state funding requirements.

### **RISE's Plans to Expand its Professional Administrative Staff**

RISE submitted plans to become an independent charter to the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) back in 2024. At a November 20, 2024 RIDE hearing, RISE described its plans and submitted its organizational structure that included:

Superintendent, Executive Director, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief of Personnel, Chief of Athletics, Director of Facilities, Director of Enrollment, Director of Technology, Director of Transportation, Managing

Director of Multi Lingual Learners, and Managing Director of Special Education.

### **Parallel School System**

WED is responsible for public education in Woonsocket, and now from its limited education funding it now effectively supports a second, parallel school system. Where cities and towns maintain one set of professional municipal staff, public education in some communities now supports two overlapping administrative structures. A municipality would not hire a second mayor or finance director; yet in education we are seeing duplication of professional staff supported by city and town public funding, particularly when larger charter networks come on line or expand.

### **Charters Provide Limited High Cost Special Education Services**

Furthermore, RISE does not currently service high cost special education students anywhere near in proportion to its relative student population. On April 10, 2025, Timothy Duffy, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Association of School Committees, testified to the House Education Committee that out of a pot of 15 million dollars to reimburse LEAs for high cost special education services, charter schools had only received \$33,277. This suggests that charters are servicing lower cost students while leaving higher cost students to the local public schools.

### **Loss of Local Control**

What began as an experiment with support from Mayor Baldelli-Hunt has created deep dissatisfaction among local elected officials over loss of local control. RISE began as a Mayoral Academy with participation from Woonsocket, Burrillville and North Smithfield. Early financial impacts on sending communities were limited, but RISE's expansion has since strained the financial sustainability of the public education from the sending communities and dramatically altered the financial sustainability of those communities. North Smithfield and Burrillville have moved to stop sending new students, allowing currently enrolled students to finish their education at RISE and thereby limiting the financial consequences

in the out years to protect their city and school budgets. Woonsocket has been left to bear the financial burden alone. Burrillville and North Smithfield's decision to exit RISE was fiscally responsible for them and Woonsocket should be allowed the same option to protect its children and financial budgets.

Public sentiment around RISE and charters in Woonsocket has shifted. When officials realized the full financial consequences to its budgets and to its schools there was a sea change in opinion. A majority of the City Council and School Committee oppose RISE's expansion. At the November 20, 2024 RIDE hearing, Woonsocket's state senators and representatives, school committee members and city council members testified against RISE's plans. Woonsocket deserves control over its public education dollars and has been stripped of its powers to control its public education system.

### **Conclusion**

Rise's professional staff have mobilized to protect their parallel school system. I ask this committee to objectively study charter financing. Please examine who is helped, who is hurt, and how the budgets of local communities are affected. Please pause further charter expansion while we study these consequences and determine policies that serve the best interests of all our students.

Respectfully,

Robert Stewart

President, Woonsocket Teachers' Guild