



To: Senate Education Committee
From: Maribeth Calabro, President
Date: May 20, 2026
Re: **Elimination of PTU Bargaining Rights
Testimony in Opposition of S 2934 (Zurier, et al.)**

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. On behalf of the thousands of educators, clinicians, and school staff represented by the RIFTHP/AFT-RI and the Providence Teachers Union (PTU), I am writing to express our **unequivocal and absolute opposition to Senate Bill 2934**.

This legislation does not form a path forward; it is a targeted, destructive rollback of basic workplace protections targets teachers and treats Providence Teachers disparately. Under the guise of "flexibility," S 2934 seeks to strip away hard-earned collective bargaining rights, dismantle the Teacher Tenure Act, and create a separate, lesser class of employment standards specifically for Providence public school teachers.

A Biased Commission and a Squandered Opportunity

My opposition to this bill is informed not only by my tenure as a Providence Teacher, my tenure as the President of PTU but as direct member of the Senate Commission created to study the state of our schools. I sat in those rooms. I listened to the testimonies. I held out hope that the Commission would act with courage to address the deep, systemic inequities plaguing Providence classrooms.

Instead, I watched that opportunity be entirely squandered. The Commission willfully ignored the actual crises facing our students and families: crumbling school infrastructure, severe underfunding, a lack of mental health supports, and a hemorrhaging educator workforce. Rather than working on real solutions, the Commission focused narrowly on attacking the union and undermining the collectively bargained contract. This bill is the direct byproduct of that toxic, pre-determined agenda. It is a political document designed to satisfy bureaucratic legacies rather than support local families, students and the teachers who serve them.

The True Impact of S 2934 and the Reality of Our Staffing Crisis

- **Ignoring the Real Numbers:** Proponents of this bill claim that union contracts are the primary barrier to student success. The data tells a vastly different story. The Providence Public School District (PPSD) has battled severe, structural staff shortages, including over **six hundred(600) resignations** since the Takeover started. Over the last six years, the district has consistently struggled to fill its classrooms, frequently opening school years with **seventy(70) to over one hundred(100) standing teacher vacancies**. These persistent shortages have left thousands of our most vulnerable students without permanent, certified educator(s) in their classroom(s).
- **Exacerbating the Staffing Crisis:** Teachers are not leaving Providence because they have "too many rights," they are leaving because they are exhausted, underpaid, unsupported and have been vilified in the public and the press since the Takeover began. Striking collective bargaining and stability from the equation will convert a critical staffing shortage into a total mass exodus.
- **Dismantles Fair Compensation Standards:** By carving out a separate "minimum salary schedule" unique to Providence, S 2934 deliberately fragments the profession. It allows for arbitrary bonus structures that mask an uncompetitive base salary, effectively telling Providence educators that they are worth less than their peers in neighboring districts.

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- **Erodes Job Security and Tenure:** The proposed changes to the dismissal, demotion, and suspension processes circumvent established civil service safeguards. Stripping away these protections invites administrative overreach, political retaliation, and favoritism.

The Legacy of Leaders Who Walked Away

We must look honestly at how we arrived here. This legislation heavily mimics the rhetoric and ideological opinions pushed by former Superintendent Susan Lusi and former union leader Steve Smith. It is deeply frustrating to watch this Commission validate the policy prescriptions of two individuals who **both walked away from this district years ago, with no concern for the immense challenges left in their wake.**

While they write op-eds from the sidelines and push for radical restructuring from the comfort of consulting firms and political advisory roles, it is our frontline teachers, our students, and our Providence families who have been left to pick up the pieces of a fractured system. The educators who stayed are the ones doing the actual work. They should not be punished for the shortcomings of administrators and leaders who chose to leave.

Real Solutions, Not Scapegoating

The educators of Providence show up to work every single day with one focus: teaching, guiding, and loving our students so they can become the thinkers, dreamers, and leaders of tomorrow. They make education happen—not heavy-handed legislation, and certainly not the punitive regulations found in this bill.

If this body genuinely wants to help Providence families, it must reject this targeted disenfranchisement. Real reform requires an orderly return to transparent local control, sustained funding, and a cooperative labor-management framework that respects the professionals on the front lines. It requires “TRUST” and one of the main themes of the Commission that we all agreed upon was, “You cannot legislate TRUST!”

On behalf of RIFTHP, I reject this legislation in its entirety. I urge this Committee to stand with Providence teachers, families, and students by **voting NO on Senate Bill 2934.**

Respectfully submitted,

Maribeth Calabro
President, RIFTHP