

**May 20, 2026**

**Testimony in Support of Senate bill S2934**

Dear Chairwoman Gallo and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am providing this testimony as the parent of two Providence Public Schools students, where I also serve on the District Wide Advisory Council, the Parent Advisory Council (since 2017, predating the state intervention), and the School Building Committee (since 2020, during the state intervention). In December 2025, I completed a two year term on the Providence School Board, and since then, I have resumed my role as a parent leader with Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE); in that capacity, I currently serve on the Providence City Council's PPSD Local Governance working group and the School Board's ad hoc committee on return to local control.

*I am in **support of Senate Bill S2934**, specifically in strong support of the sections regarding educator accountability, and in conditional support of the section regarding the end of the state intervention in Providence Schools.*

The amendments to 16-7-29, 16-13-4, and 16-13-6 proposed in S2934 reflect the recommendations by the 2024 Senate Study Commission on Improving Providence Schools, a group tasked with identifying steps to create a more rewarding professional environment for teachers and increase flexibility and accountability at the school level toward the goal of better outcomes for Providence students. The commission was composed of local leaders and education stakeholders, and heard testimony from regional and national experts to help inform their recommendations. As a resident of Senator Zurier's district, I commend his unwavering efforts to move that commission's work forward over the last two years.

I support each of the following recommendations contained with S2934 to better align PPSD labor relations with national best practices: Proposed revisions to 16-7-29 "minimum salary schedule" would allow parties to adopt alternative salary schedules for teachers outside of steps by years of service, potentially increasing compensation with bonuses for those who take on additional work, and allowing schools to recognize exceptional educators. Proposed revisions to 16-13-4 "statement of cause for dismissal - hearing - appeals - arbitration" provides expedited due process for dismissal of teachers, including clear standards and a robust arbitration process. Proposed revisions to 16-13-6 "suspension because of decrease in school population - seniority - reinstatement" expands layoff procedures to review both seniority and criteria including but not limited to educators who are most linguistically proficient, and those who are themselves alumni of Providence Public Schools.

These provisions would better equip educators to improve student outcomes and allow principals greater flexibility to ensure their teaching staff is serving all students well. As we move toward a culture of accountability for adults at every level, we must engage our educators as dedicated professionals, and keep student achievement at the center of every decision. In that

spirit, I offer some support and some recommendations for the latter part of S2934 regarding the end of the state takeover of Providence Schools on July 1, 2026.

Recently, and with consistency, parents individually and PLEE as an organization have offered testimony before this committee (and in other spaces such as the House Education Committee and the Rhode Island Board of Education Council on Elementary and Secondary Education) in opposition to any unconditional, immediate return of Providence Schools without an intentional plan to address the systemic governance issues identified in 2019, and ensure clear commitments from local leaders at City Hall and the School Board to sustain the academic progress, streamlined district systems, and relative financial stability achieved during the intervention. While S2934 is a step in the right direction, laying out expectations around some of those concerns including a focus on student outcomes for the School Board and a commitment to fund PPSD beyond maintenance of effort for the City, I fear that it does not go far enough to be enforceable on its own, and that the date in just a few short weeks is premature, especially without an accompanying agreement by all parties including RIDE.

At this time, though all local bodies claim immediate readiness, the City has yet to adequately address major issues such as burdensome procurement practices flagged in the Johns Hopkins 2019 report; several of the capital projects for school construction are significantly behind schedule and therefore over budget; and both the City and the School Board continue to demonstrate via their public meetings, media interactions, and the legislation they support that their primary focus is on control, not student outcomes.

PPSD is not only in better shape than it was prior to the intervention across multiple metrics, PPSD also has seen better pandemic recovery and overall gains than many districts in Rhode Island and in our broader region, including but not limited to: academics, attendance, graduation rates, access and completion of Career and Technical programs, and access to courses for and achievement on Advanced Placement exams. PPSD has changed for the better in this time, and is moving in the right direction because of the efforts of the state intervention team at RIDE and on the ground at PPSD. Meanwhile, though the individuals in local offices may have shifted, it does not appear that those local bodies have done sufficient work to amend past problematic systems and behaviors necessary to be ready to sustain and build upon PPSD's progress. It is my opinion based on my years of consistent attention to this issue that no legislation mandating return to local control can supplant the critical expertise of the Commissioner and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education on what will lead to a sustainable, well functioning, locally controlled school district, and that they should be leading the plan for return to local control. Until such a plan is recommended by the Commissioner and endorsed by that Council, one that ensures that PPSD does not move backwards into practices that plagued the district and harmed students prior to state intervention, I believe that PPSD should remain under state control. It is my hope that all parties can come to a mutual agreement on a return plan that centers the needs of Providence Public School students like my children and their peers.

Respectfully,  
Melissa Hughes