

May 19, 2026

RE: Testimony in Opposition to S2934 (Against)

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Natasha Salas, and I am a School Psychologist at Lillian Feinstein Elementary School in the Providence Public School District. I have worked in public education for four years, all within Providence schools. I am writing today in respectful opposition to Senate Bill S2934.

As a school psychologist, I work closely with students, teachers, administrators, and families every single day. My role requires me to see the full picture of what children need in order to succeed academically, emotionally, and socially. I have supported students through behavioral crises, learning challenges, trauma, family instability, chronic absenteeism, and mental health concerns. I have also seen firsthand how much consistency, trust, and stable relationships matter for children, especially in a district like Providence where many students already experience instability outside of school.

That is why I am deeply concerned about legislation that would weaken protections for the very educators and staff members who provide that stability.

I understand the importance of accountability in education. Every educator I know wants strong schools, effective teaching, and positive outcomes for students. However, S2934 does not feel like a balanced or collaborative approach to improvement. Instead, it feels punitive and uniquely targeted toward Providence educators in ways that no other district in Rhode Island is being subjected to.

One of my greatest concerns is that Providence is being singled out under this legislation while no other district is expected to operate under the same rules. If these proposed changes are truly considered best practice for education statewide, then why are they only being applied to Providence? The message this sends to educators working in our district is discouraging. It suggests that Providence teachers and staff deserve fewer protections, fewer rights, and less professional respect than educators elsewhere in Rhode Island.

As someone who works directly with school staff across multiple grade levels and student support teams, I can say confidently that Providence educators are already working under extremely difficult conditions. Many teachers manage overcrowded classrooms, high behavioral needs, significant learning gaps, and increasing mental health concerns among students. Despite these challenges, they continue showing up every day because they care deeply about their

students and communities. Weakening their due process rights, tenure protections, seniority protections, and layoff protections will not strengthen our schools. It will create fear, uncertainty, and instability.

I am particularly concerned about the shift away from objective protections toward systems that rely more heavily on subjective evaluations and administrative discretion. In theory, evaluations are meant to support professional growth. In practice, however, subjective systems can vary greatly depending on leadership styles, staffing shortages, school climate, and administrative turnover. In Providence, where schools have experienced frequent leadership changes over the years, this is especially concerning.

As a school psychologist, I collaborate with teachers in classrooms daily. I know how much external factors influence student performance and school data. A teacher can be highly skilled, deeply committed, and making a meaningful difference in students' lives while still facing challenges that are beyond their control. Reducing professional protections while increasing reliance on subjective evaluations opens the door to inconsistency, favoritism, and decisions that may not always reflect the true quality of an educator's work.

I am also concerned about the proposal surrounding alternative pay systems and bonus-based compensation structures. Education is not corporate sales work, and students are not numbers on a spreadsheet. Schools function best when staff members collaborate, support one another, and work as unified teams. Compensation systems tied to bonuses or unclear performance metrics risk creating division and inconsistency within school communities. They may also discourage educators from remaining in high-needs schools where measurable outcomes are often influenced by factors outside the classroom.

Providence already faces significant challenges with teacher recruitment and retention. Many educators leave not because they do not care, but because burnout, stress, and uncertainty become overwhelming. Bills like S2934 risk making these problems worse. When teachers feel unsupported or targeted, morale declines. When morale declines, turnover increases. And when turnover increases, students lose the consistency and trusted relationships they rely on.

From the perspective of student support services, stability matters tremendously. Students build trust over time with teachers, counselors, psychologists, and intervention staff. Frequent staffing changes disrupt interventions, behavioral supports, academic progress, and emotional safety. In elementary schools especially, relationships are often the foundation that allows children to learn and grow successfully. Policies that increase instability ultimately affect students the most.

I also find it contradictory that the state is discussing an end to the Providence state takeover while simultaneously pursuing extraordinary measures that continue treating Providence

differently from every other district. If the goal is to return Providence to local control and rebuild trust within the district, then continuing policies that remove protections only from Providence educators sends the opposite message. It communicates continued distrust in the professionals who have remained committed to this district throughout some of its most difficult years.

The educators and support staff in Providence are not obstacles to improvement. We are part of the solution. Meaningful school improvement happens through collaboration, investment, support, professional development, and community partnership — not by removing safeguards that help retain experienced educators in our schools.

Personally, I chose to work in Providence because I care deeply about serving diverse communities and supporting students who may need additional advocacy and resources. Over the last four years, I have worked with children who came to school carrying burdens far beyond what most people realize. I have seen teachers purchase classroom supplies with their own money, stay after hours to support struggling students, and continue giving everything they have even when resources are limited. Those are the educators who will be affected by this legislation.

I respectfully urge the Senate Education Committee to oppose S2934. Providence students deserve stability, experienced educators, and school environments built on trust and collaboration. Weakening protections for Providence teachers and staff will not create stronger schools. It risks further destabilizing a district that already faces significant challenges while unfairly treating Providence educators differently from their peers across Rhode Island.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to Rhode Island's public school students and educators.

Respectfully,

Natasha Salas
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