

May 20, 2026

RE: Testimony in Opposition to S2934 (Against)

Dear Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is **Yahaira Santana**, and I am a 3rd Grade Bilingual Teacher in Providence Public School District. I have worked in education for the past four years, and during that time I have had the privilege of teaching multilingual learners and supporting children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. I am writing to respectfully express my opposition to Senate Bill S2934.

I chose to become a teacher because I believe deeply in the transformative power of public education. Every day, I work with students who arrive at school carrying tremendous potential as well as significant challenges. Many of my students are learning English while also mastering grade-level academic content. Some come from families navigating economic hardship, housing instability, and the uncertainty that often accompanies immigration. In the classroom, consistency and trust matter tremendously. Students thrive when they know their teachers feel supported, respected, and secure in their profession.

As a bilingual teacher in Providence, I have seen firsthand how important it is to build stable relationships with students and families. My students need teachers who can focus fully on instruction, language development, and emotional support rather than worrying that longstanding professional protections may be removed. When educators feel uncertain about their future, that uncertainty inevitably affects the school environment. Stability for teachers translates into stability for students.

My primary concern with S2934 is that it continues to single out Providence educators for treatment that does not apply to teachers in any other district in Rhode Island. Public school teachers across the state serve under collective bargaining agreements that include due process rights, tenure protections, seniority provisions, and layoff procedures. These protections are not special privileges; they are safeguards designed to ensure fairness, consistency, and transparency in employment decisions.

Under S2934, Providence teachers would remain subject to extraordinary provisions that weaken these protections even as the state moves toward ending the takeover of the district. This creates a troubling contradiction. If the state believes Providence is ready to regain local control, then educators in Providence should be afforded the same rights and protections as educators elsewhere in Rhode Island. Continuing to impose exceptional measures sends the message that Providence teachers are somehow less deserving of fair treatment than our colleagues in neighboring districts.

I am particularly concerned about the erosion of due process and tenure protections. These safeguards do not prevent accountability. Rather, they ensure that employment decisions are based on documented evidence and established procedures. Effective teaching requires

professional judgment, advocacy for students, and, at times, raising concerns when children are not receiving the services they need. Teachers must be able to do this without fear that they can be dismissed or disciplined based on subjective opinions or changing administrative priorities.

Seniority and layoff protections are equally important. They provide objective standards during difficult staffing decisions and help prevent favoritism or inconsistent treatment. In a district like Providence, where schools already face significant challenges, maintaining transparent rules is essential to preserving trust between educators and administration. Removing these protections could lead many teachers to question whether decisions are being made fairly.

S2934 also appears to expand the role of subjective evaluations and administrative discretion in determining personnel decisions. Evaluation systems can be valuable tools when used to support professional growth, but they are not infallible. Teaching effectiveness is influenced by many factors, including student mobility, language acquisition, attendance, and access to resources. In bilingual classrooms, student growth often reflects progress that may not be fully captured by standardized measures or brief observations. Objective contractual protections help balance the inevitable limitations of evaluation systems.

Another concern is the authorization of alternative compensation systems and bonus-based pay structures. While rewarding excellence is an admirable goal, compensation systems that rely heavily on bonuses or discretionary criteria can create inconsistency and perceptions of favoritism. Education is fundamentally collaborative. Teachers work together to plan lessons, share strategies, and support all students in a school community. Compensation models that are not transparent or consistently applied can undermine that collaboration and create unnecessary divisions among staff.

At a time when school districts across Rhode Island and the nation are working to recruit and retain highly qualified educators, S2934 risks sending the wrong message. Providence already faces challenges in attracting teachers willing to serve in a district with significant academic and social needs. Bilingual and multilingual educators are especially difficult to recruit. Prospective teachers carefully consider whether a district offers professional respect, fair working conditions, and employment stability. If Providence is the only district where teachers can lose important protections, many talented educators may choose to work elsewhere.

The impact on morale should not be underestimated. Teachers who feel that their rights can be reduced at any time may become less likely to remain in the district long term. High turnover disrupts instructional continuity and weakens relationships with students and families. In elementary school, where young children depend on consistent routines and trusted adults, these disruptions can have lasting consequences. Students benefit most when experienced educators remain in their schools and continue building expertise over time.

I am proud to teach in Providence. I am proud of my students, their resilience, and their determination to succeed in two languages. I am proud of my colleagues, who devote countless hours to meeting the academic and emotional needs of our children. We want to be part of the

district's progress, and we welcome accountability and high expectations. What we ask in return is fairness and equal treatment under the law.

Providence educators should not be permanently subject to policies that diminish rights and protections available to every other public school teacher in Rhode Island. If state takeover is ending, then the extraordinary measures associated with that takeover should end as well. Our students deserve stable schools staffed by teachers who know they are respected and protected, and our educators deserve the same professional safeguards afforded to their peers throughout the state.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Senate Education Committee to oppose S2934.

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

Sincerely,

**Yahaira Santana**

3rd Grade Bilingual Teacher

Lillian Feinstein Elementary School At Sackett Street