



May 14, 2026

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma
Chair, Senate Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: S 2537

On behalf of the National Education Association of Rhode Island and our 12,000 members, I write in strong support of S 2537, which would modernize the calculation of creditable service for teachers who take unpaid parental or medical leave.

This legislation represents a thoughtful and necessary update to ensure that Rhode Island's teacher retirement system reflects the realities of today's workforce and the protections afforded under the federal FMLA. FMLA guarantees eligible workers up to 13 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for the birth or adoption of a child or for a serious personal or family illness. Lowering the service threshold from 180 days to 135 days better aligns state policy with the realities of federal and state protected leave.

Currently, not all teachers have equal access to paid leave benefits. In some districts, educators benefit from collectively bargained paid leave that runs concurrently with FMLA, allowing them to maintain income and still meet existing service thresholds. In other districts, however, teachers have little or no access to paid leave and must rely entirely on unpaid FMLA time. As a result, they are far more likely to fall short of the 180-day requirement. The outcome is inequitable: two teachers with identical careers and commitments to their students can be treated differently solely based on the district in which they work.

This disparity also raises serious gender equity concerns. Historically and presently, women disproportionately take parental leave. Maintaining a 180-day threshold therefore places a heavier burden on women educators, penalizing them for taking necessary time to care for their families and undermining progress toward gender equity in the workforce.

The stakes of this policy are significant. Missing even a single year of service credit can delay retirement eligibility or substantially reduce pension benefits over time. Educators who dedicate their careers to public service should not face lasting financial consequences for taking temporary, necessary leave for childbirth, adoption, or serious illness. S 2537 ensures continuity of service credit and promotes long-term retirement stability for teachers across Rhode Island.

At its core, this legislation promotes fairness, equity, and common sense. It ensures that all teachers—regardless of their district or access to paid leave—are treated equitably. It aligns state policy with federal law, supports working families, and protects the long-term financial security of Rhode Island's educators.

We respectfully urge you to support S 2537.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Lucini". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light blue rectangular background.

Alexander Lucini
Government Relations Director, NEARI