

Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

I am writing in support of S.2548, legislation focused on helping school districts manage the growing costs associated with high cost special education services.

As Superintendent of the Portsmouth School Department, I see every day how committed our schools are to supporting students with complex needs and ensuring they receive the services they deserve. We take that responsibility seriously. At the same time, the financial realities facing districts across Rhode Island continue to become more challenging.

Under the current funding structure, districts must absorb extremely high special education costs before state reimbursement becomes available. For many communities, especially smaller districts, even one unexpected placement or service can place tremendous strain on a local school budget. S.2548 takes an important and reasonable step by gradually lowering the reimbursement threshold so districts can access support sooner. This change will help ease pressure on local taxpayers while allowing districts to remain focused on student needs.

The bill also addresses a significant issue that many districts face after budgets have already been approved. From time to time, a student with intensive needs enrolls in a district after the local budget process is complete. School districts are legally and morally obligated to provide services immediately, regardless of cost or timing. That is absolutely the right thing to do for students and families. However, these unexpected expenses can create major financial challenges and often force districts to make difficult decisions elsewhere in their budgets.

This legislation recognizes that reality and creates a pathway for districts to receive reimbursement for approved extraordinary costs connected to those late enrollments. That support would make a meaningful difference for communities trying to balance educational responsibilities with fiscal stability.

Every district in Rhode Island is experiencing increased special education costs as student needs become more complex and services continue to become more expensive. S.2548 acknowledges those realities while continuing to put students first.

I respectfully urge you to support this important legislation and thank you for your continued commitment to Rhode Island students, families, and public schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Viveiros", with a long, sweeping flourish at the end.

Elizabeth Viveiros
Superintendent
Portsmouth School Department