



RHODE ISLAND  
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND  
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT  
AFL - CIO

To: Senate Finance Committee  
From: Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP Field Representative  
Date: May 19, 2026  
Re: Special Education Funding & Extraordinary Cost Reimbursement  
Testimony in **Support of S 2548** (Ujifusa, et al.)

On behalf of RIFTHP, I submit testimony in support of S 2548, legislation that strengthens state support for extraordinary special education costs and provides additional flexibility for districts serving students with high-cost needs.

Public schools have both a legal and moral obligation to provide appropriate educational services to students with disabilities regardless of cost, complexity of need, or when a student enrolls in a district. Extraordinary special education costs create significant and unpredictable fiscal pressures for local districts, particularly when high-need students move into a community after district budgets have already been adopted.

S 2548 recognizes these realities by expanding reimbursement eligibility for extraordinary special education costs and providing additional support for districts that incur significant expenses outside the normal budget cycle. These changes help create greater funding stability while ensuring districts are not penalized for serving students with intensive needs.

Importantly, the highest-cost special education responsibilities remain concentrated within traditional public school districts. State reimbursement data shows that districts such as Providence, Cranston, and Pawtucket receive millions of dollars in extraordinary cost reimbursement, while the statewide total for charter schools remains comparatively minimal despite serving thousands of students. This reflects the reality that district schools continue to shoulder the overwhelming majority of intensive special education responsibilities and associated fiscal burdens.

Special education services require highly specialized staffing, therapies, transportation, individualized programming, and wraparound supports. When districts absorb these costs without adequate state support, financial pressure can affect broader educational programming and local budgets.

Rhode Island's public schools serve all students. State funding systems should reflect that responsibility.

For these reasons, RIFTHP urges the Committee to support S 2548.

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