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The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

RE: Support for S.2849 – Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I write in support of S.2849 on behalf of the Narragansett School System.

As a district that owns and operates its own fleet of school buses, Narragansett has worked diligently to provide safe, reliable, and cost-efficient transportation services for our students. Through district ownership and management of transportation services, we are able to transport students more efficiently and at a lower cost than would otherwise be possible through broader statewide systems or external providers.

S.2849 appropriately recognizes that some districts are already operating efficient transportation models and should not be financially disadvantaged for doing so. The bill's provision allowing districts that utilize their own buses or vendors at a lower cost than the statewide transportation system to receive reimbursement from state funds is a fair and practical approach that supports local efficiency while maintaining accountability.

Importantly, many of the transportation obligations school districts face today are not locally created requirements, but rather the result of state laws, regulations, and statewide educational priorities. Districts are required to provide transportation for students attending career and technical education programs, out-of-district placements, and charter schools, among other mandates. These transportation responsibilities frequently extend beyond municipal boundaries and create significant logistical and financial pressures for local school systems.

In communities such as Narragansett, where we have invested in maintaining our own transportation infrastructure and personnel, it is reasonable that the state provide equitable support for these state-directed transportation obligations. Local taxpayers should not bear a disproportionate burden for costs that are generated by statewide educational policy decisions.

This legislation strikes an appropriate balance between statewide coordination and local flexibility. It incentivizes efficiency, protects districts that have responsibly invested in transportation operations, and acknowledges the growing transportation demands placed upon school systems across Rhode Island.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation and for your continued support of Rhode Island's students and public schools.

Peter J. Cummings, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Narragansett School System