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Commissioner

State of Rhode Island
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
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April 28, 2026

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

RE: 2026 S-3214- AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION – SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND SUPERINTENDENTS

Chair DiPalma and Members of the Senate Committee on Finance:

The Rhode Island Department of Education (“RIDE”) writes to provide information that may be of assistance to the Committee as it considers Senate Bill 3214, An Act Relating to Education—School Committees and Superintendents. This letter is not intended as a position in support of or opposition to the bill, but rather to offer technical observations and recommendations to promote clarity in implementation.

RIDE notes that Deputy Commissioner Drew Echelson previously served on the Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance and, as such, brings familiarity with the governance and fiscal context underpinning the proposed legislation. In that spirit, RIDE offers the following considerations to ensure that key provisions are clearly communicated and operationalized.

First, RIDE echoes the Division of Municipal Finance’s (“DMF”) concern regarding ambiguity in the bill’s reference to an inflation factor. As currently drafted, it is unclear which inflationary index should be applied and over what period it should be measured. RIDE supports the recommendation that the bill more clearly define the methodology for performing these calculations to ensure consistency and transparency.

Second, RIDE shares DMF’s concern that the City of Central Falls may reach the four percent (4%) tax levy cap in the near term under the proposed funding requirements. In addition, RIDE encourages further consideration of whether the City has the capacity to sustain ongoing revenue growth sufficient to meet the required one percent (1%) annual increase in local contribution over the longer term.

Third, RIDE notes that, as currently written, the City of Central Falls assumes responsibility for any deficits incurred by the school district. As of the end of Fiscal Year 2025, the City reported general fund reserves of approximately \$5.1 million. While the school district maintains a fund balance of approximately \$11 million, districts statewide are experiencing increasing fiscal pressures. The potential for school deficits to be borne by the City could have significant implications for municipal fiscal stability and should be carefully considered.

Fourth, RIDE’s preliminary estimates indicate that the State would contribute an increase of approximately \$1 million in Fiscal Year 2027 stabilization funding compared to Fiscal Year 2026 enacted levels. RIDE raises for the

The Honorable Louis P. DiPalma

April 28, 2026

2026 S-3214

Page 2 of 2

Committee's consideration whether, in instances where State contributions are increasing notwithstanding new local contributions, available school department fund balance should be utilized prior to additional State investment.

Finally, RIDE notes ambiguity in the calculation of stabilization funding related to the inclusion of tuition payments for students attending public schools of choice. Specifically, clarification is needed regarding the average daily membership (ADM) that should be used to determine stabilization amounts. If only in-district students are included, estimated stabilization funding is approximately \$12 million; if all students, including those attending public schools of choice, are included, the estimate is approximately \$6.5 million. This distinction has significant fiscal implications and should be clearly defined in the legislation.

RIDE does not take a position on the remainder of the proposed legislation. Rather, the Department's comments are offered to support clarity, transparency, and effective implementation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Brandon Bohl

Director, Finance & Accounting

CC: The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Finance
The Honorable Jonathon Acosta
Kristen Silvia, Deputy Chief of Staff/Director of Legislation