



## **WOONSOCKET EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

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Dear Rhode Island Senate Finance Committee:

*Re: Support for Senate Bills 2819, 2821, 2826, and 3276*

The Woonsocket Education Department respectfully submits this testimony in support of Senate Bills 2819, 2821, 2826, and 3276 as important measures to strengthen educational opportunities, promote student success, and support the well-being of students, educators, and families throughout Rhode Island. These legislative initiatives align with the department's commitment to providing equitable, high-quality education and ensuring that all students have access to the resources and support necessary to thrive academically and personally.

### **Why These Senate Bills Matter for Urban School Districts**

Urban school districts - including the Woonsocket Education Department, Providence Public School District, Central Falls School District, Pawtucket School Department, and West Warwick Public Schools - face disproportionately high costs related to transportation, poverty, multilingual learning, special education, student mobility, and student support services. These districts educate many of Rhode Island's highest-need students while often operating with limited local tax bases and aging infrastructure. The following bills help address long-standing inequities in Rhode Island's education funding formula and provide meaningful relief to communities serving students with the greatest academic, social, emotional, and economic needs.

### **Senate Bill 2819 – School Transportation Reimbursement**

This bill helps urban districts by ensuring the state fully recognizes the real cost of transporting students, especially children in DCYF care, homeless students protected under the McKinney-Vento Act, and students requiring specialized transportation services. Current law allows reimbursements to be reduced when state funding falls short, forcing districts to absorb the remaining costs locally. Urban districts frequently face higher transportation expenses because of student mobility, out-of-district placements, and the need for specialized routes and services. Removing the prorating language would provide more predictable and equitable support for districts already under significant financial strain.

## Senate Bill 2821 – Review of High-Need Student Funding

Urban districts educate a large percentage of students living in poverty, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing trauma, housing instability, or food insecurity. This bill requires the Department of Education to review whether the current “student success factor” actually provides enough funding to meet those students’ needs. The review is important because many districts believe the current 40% weight significantly underestimates the true cost of providing intervention services, behavioral supports, tutoring, academic recovery programs, mental health services, and additional staffing needed to help high-need students succeed.

## Senate Bill 2826 – Increased Student Success Factor for High-Poverty Districts

This bill directly increases state aid to districts where more than 45% of children live near or below poverty levels. Raising the student success factor from 40% to 50% recognizes the additional academic, social, emotional, and behavioral supports needed in high-poverty communities. Districts such as Woonsocket, Central Falls, Providence, and Pawtucket often face greater demands for intervention services, multilingual programming, chronic absenteeism initiatives, mental health supports, smaller class sizes, family outreach, and wraparound services. These supports are essential for student success but require stable and sustainable funding that many urban communities cannot generate solely through local property taxes.

## Senate Bill 3276 – Charter School Funding Relief

This bill protects local district budgets by removing the increase in charter school funding “clawbacks.” Urban districts already lose substantial funding when students transfer to charter schools, while still maintaining transportation systems, school buildings, staffing levels, special education programs, and neighborhood school services for remaining students. Increasing the reimbursement reduction from 7% to 14% would place even greater financial pressure on districts already managing structural budget challenges. For the Woonsocket Education Department, the loss of the additional reimbursement protection would result in an estimated additional cost of approximately \$750,000 to the district budget. Preventing that increase helps stabilize district finances, preserve classroom resources, maintain staffing and student services, and protect programming for the majority of students who remain in traditional public schools.

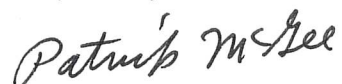
## Overall Impact

Together, these bills represent an important step toward creating a more equitable and sustainable education funding system in Rhode Island. Urban districts have long argued that the current funding structure does not fully account for the realities they face every day: concentrated poverty, higher rates of student mobility, increasing mental health needs, multilingual learner populations, aging facilities, transportation demands, and rising special education costs. Districts such as Woonsocket, Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and other urban communities are often expected to provide extensive academic and social supports while operating with limited fiscal flexibility and heavy dependence on state aid.

By strengthening transportation reimbursement, reviewing the adequacy of high-need student funding, increasing support for high-poverty districts, and limiting additional charter school financial losses, these bills collectively help ensure that funding better reflects the actual cost of educating Rhode Island’s most vulnerable students.

More importantly, they recognize that students in urban communities often require additional investments to achieve equitable outcomes. Stable and adequate funding allows districts to maintain smaller class sizes, expand intervention and tutoring programs, improve multilingual learner services, provide mental health and behavioral supports, retain qualified educators, and strengthen family and community partnerships. Ultimately, these measures help protect educational opportunities for thousands of students across Rhode Island and move the state closer to a funding system based on student need rather than local wealth disparities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patrick McGee".

Dr. Patrick McGee, Superintendent of School  
Woonsocket School Committee  
WED Director of Administration and Finance

***“Empowering all learners to shape and enrich their changing world”***

The Woonsocket Education Department does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, color or disability in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.