



Nicole Neily
President
Defending Education
4532 Cherry Hill Rd, Ste 119
Arlington, VA 22207

June 22, 2026

Executive Director
Rhode Island Ethics Commission
40 Fountain Street, 8th Floor
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Formal Ethics Complaint Against Senate President Valarie Lawson

Dear Executive Director,

Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-12(b), Defending Education hereby submits a formal Complaint against Valarie Lawson, President of the Rhode Island Senate, alleging violations of R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-5(a) and (d) of the Rhode Island Code of Ethics. The Complaint and supporting statement are enclosed.

Defending Education is a nationwide, nonpartisan membership organization composed of parents, students, educators, and others concerned about the state of education in America. Defending Education's mission is to prevent—including through advocacy and disclosure—the politicization of education, including ethical violations by public officials that compromise education policy.

This Complaint concerns (1) Lawson's vote on June 4, 2026, in favor of Senate Bill S2787A, which imposes a moratorium on charter public schools, permanently reduces the number of charters allowed in the state, and overrides the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education's approval of a new charter public school in the pre-opening preparation stage; and (2) her vote on May 28, 2026, in favor of Senate Bill S2924, legislation that would substantially expand public sector union membership in Rhode Island through card-check certification and mandatory employer neutrality.

Senate President Lawson simultaneously serves as President of the National Education Association of Rhode Island (NEARI), from which she receives a salary and whose published legislative agenda calls for the enactment of legislation that directly mirrors both S2787A and S2924. The Complaint further addresses Senate President Lawson's use of her public position to consistently advance NEARI's published institutional priorities — priorities that she sets as NEARI's President.

This Complaint is based on publicly available information and prior Commission decisions. The Complaint references the following (attached) exhibits:

- Exhibit A: Rhode Island Ethics Commission Decision and Order, Complaint No. 2019-7 (October 8, 2019)
- Exhibit B: Rhode Island Senate Bill S2924 (2026)
- Exhibit C: Screenshot of NEARI Legislative Program webpage (including photograph of Senate President Lawson)
- Exhibit D: Rhode Island Senate Bill S912 (2025)
- Exhibit E: Rhode Island Senate Bill S2787A (2026) and House companion H7415
- Exhibit F: NEARI letter opposing New England Technical Academy charter application (October 1, 2025)
- Exhibit G: Rhode Island Current article, “Senate panel advances charter school moratorium despite vocal opposition campaign” (June 3, 2026)
- Exhibit H: Capitol TV recording of Senate Labor Committee hearing, May 13, 2026 (verbal testimony of Alex Lucini, NEARI Government Relations Director, in support of S2924)
- Exhibit I: Screenshot of NEARI website advocacy photograph depicting Senate President Lawson and Alex Lucini, NEARI Government Relations Director, at the Rhode Island State House, captured June 3, 2026

Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-12(b), Defending Education respectfully requests that the Commission cause a copy of this Complaint to be served upon the Respondent within seventy-two (72) hours of filing. DE also requests written confirmation of receipt of this Complaint.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at the address or telephone number above if you require any additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Neily
President, Defending Education

Enclosures: Formal Ethics Complaint and Supporting Statement; Exhibits A through J

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND ETHICS COMMISSION**

**IN RE: VALARIE LAWSON,
RESPONDENT**

FORMAL ETHICS COMPLAINT AND SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Alleged Violations: R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-5(a) and 36-14-5(d)

I. PARTIES AND BACKGROUND

Defending Education, acting under oath pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-12(b), hereby submits this Complaint against Valarie Lawson (“Lawson” or “Respondent”), President of the Rhode Island Senate, and alleges as follows:

Respondent Valarie Lawson is an elected member of the Rhode Island Senate and currently serves as Senate President. She simultaneously serves as President of the National Education Association of Rhode Island (“NEARI”), the Rhode Island affiliate of the National Education Association, from which she receives a salary. As NEARI President, she is the head of the organization, bears direct institutional responsibility for its financial health, and is the public face of its legislative advocacy efforts.

This dual role has been the subject of prior Ethics Commission reviews. In Complaint No. 2019-7, the Commission dismissed an ethics complaint against Lawson arising from her co-sponsorship of and vote in favor of legislation affecting collective bargaining agreements for public school teachers and municipal employees. At that time, the Respondent held the position of First Vice-President of NEARI. The Commission dismissed that complaint on two specific grounds: first, that the legislation “did not result in any appreciable financial impact upon NEARI itself as an entity”; and second, that the legislation impacted the Respondent “to no greater or lesser extent than any other similarly situated member of the class of Rhode Island public school teachers,” thereby invoking the class exception under R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-7(b). (See Exhibit A.)

Upon assuming the role of Senate President in 2025, Respondent sought an advisory opinion from the Commission. In that opinion, the Commission stated that Valarie Lawson would need to recuse herself in specific instances:

“[T]he Petitioner would also be required to recuse herself from participation in discussions and voting on matters for which her business associate or employer appears or presents evidence or arguments before the General Assembly or the Senate, unless one of the exceptions to 520-RICR-00-00-1.2.1(B) applies. The Petitioner will likewise be required

to do the same if an authorized representative of her business associate or employer appears on their behalf to present evidence or arguments.”

Advisory Op. 2025-39, R.I. Ethics Comm’n (June 10, 2025), perma.cc/SWL6-LYFG. The legislation at issue here directly serves NEARI’s published institutional agenda in a manner that generates a direct and foreseeable financial benefit to NEARI as an entity. Moreover, an authorized representative of NEARI testified in favor of S2787A and S2924. Accordingly, the Respondent should have recused.

II. SPECIFIC ACTS COMPLAINED OF

A. The Vote on S2924 (May 28, 2026)

On May 28, 2026, Senate President Lawson voted in favor of Senate Bill S2924, legislation that would amend Rhode Island’s Labor Relations Act to make it substantially easier for public sector employees to unionize. (See Exhibit B.) Specifically, S2924 would:

- Allow union certification through card signatures from more than fifty percent of a bargaining unit, bypassing a formal election (card-check certification);
- Require all management and administrative personnel to remain neutral during organizing, prohibiting any encouragement or discouragement of employees’ organizing activity; and
- Mandate a minimum of thirty minutes of paid union orientation time for all newly hired public sector employees.

These provisions are not incidentally beneficial to NEARI. They are explicitly listed as NEARI’s own published legislative priorities. NEARI’s legislative program states that NEARI supports legislation expanding collective bargaining rights and specifically lists as an institutional priority:

“State Sector Neutrality requiring: Employer neutrality and card-check recognition for all State Labor Relations Act (SLRA) elections [and] Thirty minutes of paid union orientation for all newly hired public-sector employees.”

NEARI Legislative Program, NEARI (archived June 10, 2026), perma.cc/9HKB-99T6. S2924 directly implements this exact priority. And Lawson is prominently featured in photographs on NEARI’s legislative program webpage — on the floor of the Senate no less — alongside these stated priorities, documenting her public role as the leader of NEARI’s legislative advocacy efforts. (See Exhibits C and I.) In other words, Lawson didn’t just vote for legislation that happens to benefit her employer; she voted to enact her employer’s explicitly published lobbying agenda, one that she sets as the employer’s leader. See R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-5(a) (“No person subject to this code of ethics shall have any interest, financial *or otherwise*, direct *or indirect*, or ... incur *any obligation* of any nature, which is in substantial conflict with the proper discharge of his or her duties” (emphasis added)).

Lawson’s support and vote for S2924 also directly violates the instructions given to her in the Commission’s June 2025 advisory opinion, which stated that she would be “required to recuse herself from participation in discussions and voting on matters for which her business associate or employer appears or presents evidence or arguments before the General Assembly or the Senate.” NEARI’s Government Relations Director, Mr. Alex Lucini, testified verbally before the Senate Labor Committee on May 25, 2026, in support of S2924. (See Exhibit H.) Mr. Lucini reports directly to Lawson in her capacity as NEARI President and appears alongside her in NEARI’s own published advocacy materials at

the Rhode Island State House. (See Exhibit J.) Lawson subsequently voted in favor of S2924 on the floor of the Senate on May 28, 2026, without recusing herself.

The advisory opinion also told Lawson she would be “required to recuse” when her vote is “likely to result in a direct financial benefit” for “her employer.” But her vote for S2924 ran afoul of this guidance too. The financial nexus is direct and foreseeable. S2924 is designed to expand the number of public sector employees who are unionized. More union members means more dues-paying members. More dues means more revenue for NEARI as an institution. Unlike the legislation reviewed in Complaint No. 2019-7, which affected terms and conditions of employment for an existing workforce, S2924 is specifically designed to grow the union membership base itself, a result with direct and appreciable financial consequences for NEARI as an entity.

Indeed, in dismissing Complaint No. 2019-7, the Commission specifically noted that the bill at issue there did not “cause a significant change in NEARI membership.” (See Exhibit A.) But here, the opposite is true. NEARI, Lawson’s employer, has a direct financial interest in increasing its membership, and thus in S2924’s passage. The 2019 Commission was clear that financial impact on NEARI as an entity — rather than on the broad class of teachers — is the key distinction. S2924 meets that standard directly.

This conduct implicates R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-5(d), which prohibits any person subject to the Code of Ethics from using “in any way” their public office to obtain financial gain for “any business by which the person is employed or which the person represents.” It also implicates § 36-14-5(a), which prohibits any interest or activity in substantial conflict with the proper discharge of public duties. And § 36-14-7(a) defines such interest to include situations where a person has reason to believe or expect that “any business by which the person is employed” will derive a direct monetary gain by reason of their official activity.

B. The Vote on S2787A

Similarly, on June 4, 2026, Senate President Lawson voted in favor of Senate Bill S2787A, which imposes a moratorium on charter public schools, permanently reduces the number of charters allowed in the state, and overrides the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education’s approval of a new charter public school (De La Comunidad Bilingual), a school that is already in the pre-opening preparation stage. The sponsor of the identical House companion bill, H7415, publicly stated in multiple news outlets that the legislation was brought forward “at the request of teachers’ unions.” (See Exhibit G.)

A moratorium on new charter schools directly serves NEARI’s published institutional interest. NEARI’s legislative program explicitly lists opposition to charter school expansion as an organizational priority and calls for the enactment of a moratorium. (See Exhibit C.) That should come as no surprise when the person who decides Senate priorities is the same person that sets NEARI’s priorities.

NEARI’s financial interest is to minimize the number of charter schools in the state. S2787A does just that.

C. The Vote on S912 (2025) — Pattern of Conduct

Lawson’s votes this session are not an isolated act. In 2025, she voted in favor of Senate Bill S912, legislation that would have required charter schools to include union neutrality clauses in employment agreements, effectively prohibiting charter school leadership from discussing the pros and cons of unionization with their staff. (See Exhibit D.) That bill passed the Senate but did not advance to the House floor.

The practical effect of S912 would have been to remove a significant obstacle to unionization in the charter school sector, expanding the potential dues-paying membership base of organizations like NEARI. And as explained above, NEARI has a foreseeable financial interest in expanding its dues-paying membership. *See* R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-5(a); R.I. Code of Ethics 1.1.5 (“A public official has reason to believe or expect a Conflict of Interest exists when it is ‘reasonably foreseeable.’”). NEARI’s opposition to the growth of the charter sector — and its institutional interest in expanding union membership within it — is further evidenced by NEARI’s October 1, 2025 letter to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education opposing the approval of the New England Technical Academy charter application. (See Exhibit F.).

Taken together, the Respondent’s votes on S912, S2787 and S2924 reflect a consistent pattern of using her position as Senate President to advance NEARI’s published institutional agenda. This pattern is relevant to the Commission’s assessment of whether the Respondent’s conduct constitutes a knowing and willful use of public office for the financial benefit of her employer.

III. THE STRUCTURAL CONFLICT

The conflict presented here is structural as well as transactional. As Senate President, Lawson exercises significant authority over the legislative agenda, including legislation governing public sector labor relations and the charter public school sector. As NEARI President, she leads the organization that directly benefits when public sector labor law is expanded and charter school growth is restricted in the ways these bills contemplate.

The structural nature of this conflict is perhaps best illustrated by what it means in practice: when NEARI negotiates its legislative agenda with the Rhode Island Senate, Lawson need only negotiate with herself. NEARI President Lawson’s institutional positions are Senate President Lawson’s institutional positions, and vice versa. She does not merely share interests with her employer — she establishes those interests with one hand, and votes in favor of them with the other. As Senate President, she sets the agenda for her chamber. And in doing so, puts her employer’s priorities on that list. The Government Relations Director of NEARI, an employee who reports directly to her in her capacity as NEARI President, lobbies the Senate for legislation that Senate President Lawson then votes to pass without recusal.

Moreover, as the President of NEARI, Senate President Lawson’s own job performance would be evaluated based in part on the organization’s accomplishment of its goals. Here, Senate President Lawson accomplished two of NEARI’s stated goals by bringing to the floor and voting in favor of S2924 and S2787A, thereby using her role as Senate President to improve her own job performance in her day job.

Though the Commission’s advisory opinion predicted that Lawson’s dual service as NEARI President and Senate President would not result in a “per se” conflict of interest, that conclusion rested in part on Lawson’s promise that she would “recuse from matters directly financially impacting herself, her business associates, or her employer.” But Lawson’s voting record belies that promise. Indeed, the record before the Commission documents a consistent pattern in which Lawson has used her position of authority as Senate President to advance NEARI’s interests: through her vote on S912 in 2025, her vote on S2924 on May 28, 2026, and her vote on S2787A on June 4, 2026.

IV. RELIEF REQUESTED

For the foregoing reasons, the Complainant respectfully requests that the Rhode Island Ethics Commission:

1. Accept this Complaint and conduct an initial determination pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-12(c) and Commission Regulation 3.8;
2. Authorize a full investigation into whether Senate President Lawson's votes in favor of S2924 and S2787A — viewed in the context of her broader legislative conduct since assuming the NEARI presidency — constitute a knowing and willful violation of R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-5(a) and/or 36-14-5(d); and
3. Issue such orders as the Commission deems appropriate upon a finding of violation, including but not limited to those available under R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-13(d).

VERIFICATION

The undersigned declares under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of the Complainant's knowledge, information, and belief.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

NOTARY:

EXHIBIT LIST

- Exhibit A: Rhode Island Ethics Commission Decision and Order, Complaint No. 2019-7 (October 8, 2019)
 - Exhibit B: Rhode Island Senate Bill S2924 (2026)
 - Exhibit C: Screenshot of NEARI Legislative Program webpage (including photograph of Senate President Lawson)
 - Exhibit D: Rhode Island Senate Bill S912 (2025)
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 - Exhibit I: Screenshot of NEARI website advocacy photograph depicting Senate President Lawson and Alex Lucini, NEARI Government Relations Director, at the Rhode Island State House, captured June 3, 2026
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Exhibit A

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND ETHICS COMMISSION

IN RE: VALARIE LAWSON,
RESPONDENT

COMPLAINT NO. 2019-7

DECISION AND ORDER

The instant Complaint was filed on May 6, 2019, by Brandon S. Bell, individually and as Special Counsel to the Rhode Island Republican Party, and names Valarie Lawson, an elected member of the Rhode Island Senate ("Senator Lawson"), as the Respondent. The Complaint alleges that on February 27, 2019, the Respondent, who is also a teacher and Vice President of The National Education Association of Rhode Island ("NEARI"), co-sponsored legislation 2019-S 0512 ("legislation" or "Senate Bill 0512A") which requires that all contractual provisions contained in an otherwise expired collective bargaining agreement with certified school teachers and municipal employees shall continue until such time as a successor agreement has been reached between the parties, excluding contractual provisions that limit layoffs. The Complaint further alleges that on April 24, 2019, at a hearing before the Senate Committee on Labor ("Senate Labor Committee"), of which the Respondent is a member, the Respondent considered and voted in favor of an amended version of the legislation following testimony in support of the legislation from Patrick Crowley ("Crowley"), who is employed by NEARI as a lobbyist. The Complaint further alleges that on May 1, 2019, the legislation went before the full Senate, at which time the Respondent advocated for its passage and then voted to approve it.

On May 21, 2019, pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-12(c)(2) and Commission Regulation 520-RICR-00-00-3.8 Initial Determination of Complaint (1003), the Commission, by a vote of 3-2, made an initial determination that the Complaint alleged facts that, if true, are sufficient to constitute a violation of the Code of Ethics, and authorized a full investigation. The full investigation was completed on September 15, 2019.

Thereafter, on September 24, 2019, the Commission conducted a probable cause hearing in this matter pursuant to Section 36-14-12(c) and Commission Regulation 520-RICR-00-00-3.11 Finding of Probable Cause (1006). The Commissioners present for the hearing were: Ross Cheit, Chair; M. Therese Antone; J. Douglas Bennett; Emili B. Vaziri; Timothy Murphy, and Kyle P. Palumbo. Prosecutor Lynne M. Radiches presented the case on behalf of the People of the State of Rhode Island. The Respondent appeared and was represented by attorney Carly Beauvais lafrate, who had previously filed a Response to Complaint and Motion to Dismiss. The Commission considered the Investigative Report which had been prepared and submitted in advance of the hearing by the Prosecutor, the Response to Complaint and Motion to Dismiss filed by the Respondent's attorney, and the oral arguments of the parties.

The investigation revealed that the Respondent was elected to the Senate on November 4, 2018, and began serving on January 1, 2019. She is employed full-time as a social studies teacher at East Providence High School. There are more than 11,500 public school teachers in Rhode Island. As a teacher, the Respondent is a member of NEARI and the National Education Association ("NEA"). For the past six years, she has held the position of First Vice-President of

NEARI, the Rhode Island affiliate of the NEA which provides collective bargaining representation, grievance and arbitration representation and other services to its members. The approximately 11,750 members of NEARI include public sector teachers, public and private sector education support professionals, public and private sector higher education faculty, graduate students and staff, and state and municipal employees and retirees. Approximately half of all union-affiliated Rhode Island public school teachers are NEARI members, with the other half being members of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers.

As First Vice-President, the Respondent serves on the NEARI Executive Committee, is an *ex officio* member of its commissions and committees, and presides in the absence of the President at Association meetings. The Respondent receives an annual salary of \$30,160 from NEARI; any salary increases are calculated at the same time and at the same percentage as the salaries for all other NEARI staff members. The Respondent does not receive bonuses, performance pay or incentive pay of any kind from NEARI, nor did she receive any financial consideration from anyone or any entity for her participation and vote relative to Senate Bill 0512A.

On February 27, 2019, the Respondent was one of five senators who co-sponsored the legislation at issue in this matter. After the legislation was introduced, the Respondent spoke with the Senate's Chief Legal Counsel and the Ethics Commission staff¹ concerning the application of the Code of Ethics to her participation in the Senate. On April 24, 2019, the Senate Labor Committee held a hearing on the legislation. After consulting with the Senate Labor Committee's attorney, the Respondent recused from participating in the discussion relative to the legislation and left the committee table during all testimony, including that of NEARI lobbyist Crowley. The Respondent did, though, vote in favor of referring the bill to the full Senate, which the Senate Labor Committee approved by a vote of 7-1. On May 1, 2019, the legislation went before the full Senate, where the Respondent advocated for its passage and voted to approve it. The legislation passed the Senate by a vote of 28-8 and, after passage by the House of Representatives on May 9, 2019, was signed into law by the Governor on May 14, 2019.

The Complaint alleged that: "This legislation increases the negotiating leverage of teacher unions in the collective bargaining process. Increasing the leverage of teacher unions in collective bargaining, decreases the likelihood that teachers would want to cease being dues paying members of teachers unions." However, the investigation revealed that non-union teachers receive the same salaries and benefits as teachers who are members of a union. Furthermore, the investigation revealed that neither the decision in Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31, 138 S. Ct. 2448 (2018) (holding that public sector employees who refuse to be union members cannot be compelled to pay union dues), nor the subsequent passage of the legislation in May of 2019, had caused a significant change in NEARI

¹ The staff of the Ethics Commission is available by telephone to answer general questions concerning the application of the Code of Ethics. Commission staff are not authorized to, and do not, provide oral "safe harbor" or permission to perform any act. Callers are informed of relevant provisions of the Code of Ethics and may be directed to previously issued advisory opinions or decisions that are analogous to the situation presented. Callers are advised that the only way to obtain specific and binding advice from the Ethics Commission is through the receipt of a written advisory opinion.

membership. For the years 2017-2019, the number of members has remained in the range of 11,750-12,000. The investigation also revealed that the financial impact of the legislation was not on NEARI itself, as an entity, but rather on the terms and conditions of employment for municipal employees and teachers, some of whom are NEARI members.

After hearing the presentation of the parties, the Commission voted 5-1 that there did not exist probable cause to believe that the Respondent, by co-sponsoring, advocating for, and voting to pass the legislation, violated R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 36-14-5(a) or (d), or Commission Regulation 520-RICR-00-00-1.2.1 Additional Circumstances Warranting Recusal (36-14-5002), and to dismiss the Complaint.

The Commission found that there was no direct financial impact, reasonably foreseeable or otherwise, upon the Respondent aside from that which impacts all teachers and therefore falls under the class exception at section 36-14-7(b). The Respondent is one of more than 11,500 public school teachers in Rhode Island impacted by the legislation,² and because the legislation impacts the Respondent to no greater or lesser extent than any other similarly situated member of the class of Rhode Island public school teachers, the class exception applies. Additionally, the Commission found that there was no evidence of any relationship between the passage of the legislation and the Respondent's predetermined salary from NEARI.

Furthermore, the investigation revealed that although the legislation may have had a common financial impact upon NEARI's members as discussed above, the legislation did not result in any appreciable financial impact upon NEARI itself as an entity. Therefore, there is not probable cause to believe that the Respondent used her public office to obtain financial gain for herself or to benefit NEARI as an entity.

WHEREFORE, it is hereby:

ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED

1. That the Complaint is hereby dismissed with prejudice.



Ross Cheit, Chair

Dated: October 8 2019

² The investigation revealed that the legislation affected not only 11,500 school teachers, but also applied to another 20,000 public employees who belong to Council 94, the AFL-CIO, the Teamsters, the Rhode Island Laborers' Union, and the National Association of Government Employees.

CERTIFICATION

I, Tracy Teixeira, hereby certify that on the 8th day of October 2019, I caused a true copy of the within Decision and Order to be forwarded by first class mail, postage prepaid, to Respondent's counsel of record, Carly Beauvais lafrate, 38 North Court Street, Providence, RI 02903.


Tracy Teixeira

NOTICE OF APPELLATE RIGHTS

THIS DECISION AND ORDER CONSTITUTES A FINAL ORDER OF THE RHODE ISLAND ETHICS COMMISSION PURSUANT TO R.I. GEN. LAWS § 42-35-15. PURSUANT THERETO, THIS ORDER MAY BE APPEALED TO THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR PROVIDENCE COUNTY WITHIN THIRTY (30) DAYS OF THE MAILING DATE OF THIS ORDER. SUCH APPEAL, IF TAKEN, MUST BE COMPLETED BY FILING A COMPLAINT IN THE SUPERIOR COURT. A COPY OF THE COMPLAINT MUST BE SERVED UPON THE ETHICS COMMISSION WITHIN TEN (10) DAYS AFTER IT IS FILED IN COURT; PROVIDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE TIME FOR SERVICE OF THE COMPLAINT MAY BE EXTENDED BY ORDER OF THE COURT FOR GOOD CAUSE.

Exhibit B

<https://perma.cc/CZF9-6CYX>

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LC005876
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- LABOR RELATIONS ACT

Introduced By: Senators Thompson, Patalano, and Murray

Date Introduced: March 04, 2026

Referred To: Senate Labor & Gaming

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 28-7-14 of the General Laws in Chapter 28-7 entitled "Labor
2 Relations Act" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **28-7-14. Exclusive representation of employees.**

4 (a) Representatives designated or selected for the purposes of collective bargaining by the
5 majority of the employees in a unit appropriate for those purposes, or by the majority of the
6 employees voting in an election conducted pursuant to §§ 28-7-15 — 28-7-19, shall be the
7 exclusive representatives of all the employees in the appropriate unit for the purposes of collective
8 bargaining in respect to rates of pay, wages, hours of employment, or other conditions of
9 employment; provided, that employees, directly or through representatives, shall have the right at
10 any time to present grievances to their employer.

11 (b)(1) Employees not represented by any labor organization for the purposes of collective
12 bargaining may indicate their desire for representation by demonstrating their majority support. To
13 demonstrate majority support, employees may either:

14 (i) File cards signed by at least thirty percent (30%) of the appropriate unit requesting an
15 election run by the board defined in § 28-7-3, with a majority of employees voting in the election
16 voting for representation; or

17 (ii) File cards signed by more than fifty percent (50%) of the appropriate unit requesting
18 representation and waiving their right to the election provided in subsection (b)(1)(i) of this section.

19 (2) If the board receives cards requesting exclusive representation by a labor organization

1 from at least fifty percent (50%) of the appropriate unit, the board shall certify the unit.

2 (c) No agent of the state nor any state or public agency shall encourage or discourage their
3 employees from exercising their rights under this section. All management or administrative
4 personnel shall remain neutral.

5 SECTION 2. Section 36-11-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 36-11 entitled "Organization
6 of State Employees" is hereby amended to read as follows:

7 **36-11-2. Discrimination because of membership in employee organization prohibited.**

8 (a) There shall be no discrimination against any state employee because the employee has
9 formed, joined, or chosen to be represented by any labor or employee organization.

10 (b) Supervisory employees shall not endorse any particular labor or employee organization
11 or by reason of membership in any organization, show prejudice or discriminate against any
12 individual employee.

13 (c) Membership in any labor or employee organization may be determined by each
14 individual employee and each individual member. Membership dues or fees are established in
15 amounts as determined by the organization.

16 (d) The state controller shall hereby be directed, upon certification of the exclusive
17 bargaining organization, to deduct biweekly membership dues from the employee's salary and
18 remit the amount to the treasurer of the exclusive bargaining organization.

19 (e) Any employees in the bargaining unit, who are not members of the exclusive bargaining
20 representative organization, may be required by the labor or employee organization to pay a
21 reasonable charge for grievances and/or arbitrations brought at the nonmember's request.

22 (f) The employer shall notify the exclusive bargaining unit representative organization of
23 the hiring of any employee in the bargaining unit. The notice shall be given promptly after the
24 hiring decision is made but in no event later than the fifth business day following the employee's
25 start date.

26 **(g) Bargaining unit lists.**

27 (1) Once every one hundred twenty (120) days, or on a more frequent basis if mutually
28 agreed to by the employer and the employee organization, the employer shall provide the employee
29 organization that is the exclusive representative of a bargaining unit, and any statewide employee
30 organization, of which the local employee organization is an affiliate, with a list of all employees
31 in that bargaining unit.

32 (2) The list shall include, as appropriate, each employee's employee ID number, first name,
33 last name, work location/department, job title/classification, date of hire, date of birth, demographic
34 information, contact information, and whether the employee has, to the employer's records,

1 authorized dues deduction. As used in this section, “demographic information” includes the
2 employee’s sex and race/ethnicity, to the extent the employer is in possession of such information.
3 As used in this section, “contact information” includes an employee’s home address, mailing
4 address, work email address, personal email address, and home and personal cellular telephone
5 numbers, to the extent that the employer is in possession of such information.

6 (3) To the extent possible, the employee list shall be in alphabetical order by last name and
7 provided as an electronic spreadsheet with one column for each of the data listed in subsection
8 (g)(2) of this section.

9 (4) The list shall be kept confidential by the employer and the employee organization and
10 shall be exempt from copying and inspection under chapter 2 of title 38 (“access to public records”).

11 (h) A representative of the labor organization shall have at least thirty (30) minutes, to meet
12 with all newly hired bargaining unit employees, in person, for the purpose of orienting the
13 employees to the union. Non-union personnel shall absent themselves from the room during this
14 time. The orientation shall occur during the employer’s regularly scheduled new hire orientation.
15 If no such orientation exists, the employer shall provide coverage for all new employees, for at least
16 thirty (30) minutes to attend an orientation in person, to be scheduled by mutual agreement between
17 the employer and the labor organization.

18 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- LABOR RELATIONS ACT

1 This act would allow employees, not represented by a union, to create a group to
2 collectively bargain with employers. The employees would need to demonstrate that they have
3 majority support for the creation of a collective bargaining unit by using signed file cards to gauge
4 the level of support they enjoy, as set forth by the act.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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Exhibit C

<https://perma.cc/5KL5-M6KY>



ACTION CENTER



NEARI Legislative Program

NEARI Legislative Program

We are a voice for every student and an advocate for worker rights and working conditions.



SHARE



All students deserve an education that **inspires them**, encourages their curiosity, and prepares them for success.



All workers deserve the **support, resources, and time** to do their jobs well, and the security to retire with dignity.

Through NEARI member advocacy at the Statehouse, we work to create **public pre-K-12 schools, colleges, universities, and public services** that are worthy of all Rhode Islanders, and to build a more fair, just, and equitable nation for everyone.

2026 Legislative Priorities

NEARI enters the 2026 legislative session focused on four core priorities to strengthen public education, protect retirement security, safeguard democratic control of schools, and advance fair wages, benefits, and working conditions for all employees.

1. PROTECTING PUBLIC EDUCATION FROM FEDERAL VOUCHER SCHEMES AND THE DISMANTLING OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

NEARI unequivocally opposes the Trump Administration's nationwide voucher scheme disguised as scholarship granting organizations and its broader efforts to dismantle public education and undermine democratic, locally governed school systems.

- **Oppose** any federal voucher opt-in and prevent Rhode Island from being used as a test case for the Trump Administration's unaccountable voucher agenda, which diverts public dollars away from public schools and lacks transparency and oversight.



- **Support** strong state-level protections to counteract federal actions and policies designed to weaken public education, prioritize public resources and erode local control.

2. ENSURING FAIR FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION, HIGHER ED & PUBLIC HEALTH

K-12 Public Education

- **Increase** funding in the state budget to meet the needs of students, educators, and communities.
- **Revise** the state education funding formula to better reflect student needs and ensure municipalities pay their fair share.
- **Support** a moratorium on charter school expansion.

Higher Education and Public Health

- **Increase** funding in the state budget to meet the needs of students, educators, and workers.
- **Protect** investments in URI, CCRI, and the Department of Health to stabilize staffing, support student needs, and ensure safe, well-functioning institutions.

3. IMPROVING PENSIONS AND RETIREMENT SECURITY



Rhode Island must restore fairness and long-term sustainability to the ERSRI system. NEARI supports legislation that improves pension and retirement benefits for both active and retired members.

4. STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS

To protect workers and stabilize the education workforce, NEARI supports legislation that expands collective bargaining rights and workplace fairness, including:

- State Sector Neutrality requiring:
 - Employer neutrality and card-check recognition for all State Labor Relations Act (SLRA) elections
 - Thirty minutes of paid union orientation for all newly hired public-sector employees
- Improvements to the desk audit criteria to ensure fair and equitable recognition of the work performed by higher-ed education support professionals (ESPs) and DOH Professional Staff Association members.
- Legislation allowing state employees to negotiate longevity pay.

HOUSE/SENATE BILLS

[HB7163](#) | [SB2139](#) Federal Tax Credit Voucher Program Requires both the General Assembly and the Governor to decide whether



and under what circumstances to participate in the federal tax credit voucher program.

[HB7415](#) | [SB2787](#) Charter School Moratorium Prohibits granting approval for new or expanded district charter schools, independent charter schools, or mayoral academies for the 2026-2029 school years. It also restricts state funding for unapproved charter schools during this period.

[HB7127](#) State Budget Article 9 relating to Education Funding

[HB8351](#) | [SB3015](#) Funding Formula Establishes the Rhode Island education funding and accountability act, which would include a totally revised and revamped formula for funding all levels of public education in Rhode Island.

[HB7683](#) | [SB2678](#) Teacher Survivor Benefit Increases monthly minimum benefit for a spouse, domestic partner, former spouse.

[HB7053](#) | [SB2537](#) 135-Day Service Gives teachers, who take an unpaid parental or medical leave during the year, credit for a year of service for that school year if they served a minimum of 135 days.

[HB7390](#) Rule of 90 at 60 Allows teachers, state, and municipal employees to retire upon the earlier of reaching age 60 with 30 years of service or the employee's retirement eligibility date under present state statutes.



[HB7160](#) | [SB2842](#) Rule of 85 Allows teachers, state and municipal employees to retire when they have at least 28 years of active service and their retirement age, when combined with the number of their years of service reaches, the number 85.

[HB7253](#) | [SB2374](#) 5 to 3 Retro to 2012 Retirees Changes the teacher and state employees' retirement benefit calculations' cutoff date from July 1, 2024 to July 1, 2012, for all retirement members eligible to and who retire on or after the new July 1, 2012 cutoff date.

[HB8147](#) | [SB2818](#) COLA Benefit Retirees in the pension system receive cost of living adjustment compounded into the retiree's total retirement benefits each year beginning 1.1.26 (prospective only).

[HB7217](#) | [SB2171](#) Desk Audit Amends the desk audit analysis and classification specification so that the lack of supervision of other FTEs does not prevent an employee from receiving a classification upgrade.

[HB7291](#) | [SB2924](#) State Sector Neutrality Allows employees not represented by a union to form a collective bargaining unit by demonstrating majority support through signed cards, while all management and administrative personnel shall remain neutral.

[HB7055](#) | [SB2501](#) Longevity Beginning July 1, 2026, allows state union employees to negotiate longevity payments in their collective bargaining agreements.



NEARI looks forward to working with lawmakers, education partners, labor allies, and community stakeholders throughout the 2026 legislative session to advance policies that strengthen public education,

protect public workers and retirees, and ensure every Rhode Island community has access to fully funded, high-quality public services.

For questions, partnership opportunities, or additional information regarding bill support or opposition, please contact NEARI Government Relations Director [Alex Lucini](#)

Together, we showed what's possible when educators and working people lead! Revisit the big and small victories we won for workers, students, families, and our communities across Rhode Island in 2025.

LOOK BACK

Media inquiries can be directed to Communications Director [Stephanie Mandeville](#).



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Exhibit D

<https://perma.cc/UFU5-XH5P>

2025 -- S 0912 SUBSTITUTE A AS AMENDED

LC001636/SUB A

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- REGIONAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS--
ESTABLISHMENT OF CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Introduced By: Senators Thompson, Murray, Pearson, Patalano, Urso, Valverde, and
Kallman

Date Introduced: March 27, 2025

Referred To: Senate Labor & Gaming

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 16-45-6 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-45 entitled "Regional Vocational Schools [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended to read as follows:

16-45-6. Powers additional to previous authority.

(a) The powers delegated and authorized in this chapter for the board of regents for elementary and secondary education and the department of elementary and secondary education shall be in addition to those previously authorized by any other general or public law.

(b) The governance, funding, and programming of the William M. Davies, Jr. vocational technical school and the Metropolitan Career and Technical School shall be in accordance with the rules and regulations formulated by the board of regents for elementary and secondary education pursuant to chapter 35 of title 42. Provided, however, the additional appropriation by the General Assembly in fiscal year 2005 for the William M. Davies, Jr. Vocational Technical School shall be used to fund sixty (60) additional placements. Forty (40) of those placements shall be made available to students from the City of Providence.

(c) The purpose of this chapter is to restructure the system of career and technical schools in Rhode Island for the benefit of the students, the economy, and the general welfare. The paramount aim is to enable the schools to make more significant contributions in providing the state's students with the career preparation they need to compete and succeed in the world of today

1 and of the future. To ensure student success, a system of model career and technical schools will
2 be established and supported. These schools will provide: integrated academic and vocational
3 curricula, up to date technology, programs to meet the varying needs of all students, and strong
4 links to business, industry, postsecondary education, and the community.

5 (d)(1) There shall be a system of state operated career and technical schools serving
6 geographic areas of the state. Students attending these regional schools will do so on a full time
7 basis with the costs for their education at the regional school being shared by the state and the
8 district of residence as described in § 16-7.2-5. State schools currently participating in the state
9 retirement system that are not receiving reimbursement pursuant to § 16-16-22 shall have their state
10 aid adjusted to reflect full reimbursement for expenses related to employer retirement contributions
11 for those staff employed by the state.

12 (2) These schools shall be operated as local education agencies and each shall be governed
13 by a board of trustees. With the exception of those powers and duties reserved by the director, the
14 commissioner of elementary and secondary education, and the board of regents for elementary and
15 secondary education, the board of trustees shall have the powers and duties of school committees.
16 The Davies school shall be the first school operated under the provisions of this chapter and shall
17 be renamed the William M. Davies, Jr. career and technical high school. The Metropolitan Career
18 and Technical School shall be the second school operated under the provisions of this chapter.

19 (e)(1) The board of regents for elementary and secondary education shall appoint the
20 members of the board of trustees from nominations made by the commissioner of elementary and
21 secondary education. The chairperson shall also be selected in this manner. The board of regents
22 shall determine the number, qualifications, and terms of office of members of the board of trustees.
23 The board of trustees will be broadly representative of the local communities served by each school
24 and the larger statewide workforce interests.

25 (2) The board of regents shall establish strategic directions for the career and technical
26 education system that are consistent with the state's economic development plans, workforce
27 requirements, and educational priorities and learner outcomes established by the board of regents.

28 (3) The board of regents shall provide parameters for the overall budget requests, approve
29 the budget, and participate in budget development as required in subsection (i).

30 (f)(1) The commissioner of elementary and secondary education shall recommend
31 parameters for the overall budget requests, recommend a budget and participate in budget
32 development as required in subsection (i).

33 (2) The commissioner shall approve the process for selection of a director of each regional
34 school. The commissioner shall develop a plan for statewide implementation of the provisions of

1 this chapter.

2 (g) The board of trustees shall meet monthly and serve without compensation. Nine (9)
3 members of the board of trustees shall be required to attend teacher appeal hearings conducted
4 pursuant to § 16-13-4. The board of trustees shall have broad policy making authority for the
5 operation of the school consistent with subsection (e) and the following powers and duties:

6 (1) To identify the educational needs of the communities in the district.

7 (2) To develop educational policies to meet the needs of students in the communities served
8 by the school district.

9 (3) To appoint a director of its regional school to serve as its chief executive officer and to
10 approve assistant and associate directors from nominations made by the director.

11 (4) To provide policy guidance and participate in budget development as required in
12 subsection (i).

13 (5) To develop staffing policies which ensure that all students are taught by educators of
14 the highest possible quality.

15 (h)(1) The director will serve at the pleasure of the board of trustees with the initial
16 appointment to be for a period of not more than three (3) years, provided, that the term and
17 conditions of employment are subject to the approval of the board of regents for elementary and
18 secondary education.

19 (2) It is the responsibility of the director to manage and operate the school on a day to day
20 basis. The director's duties shall include the following:

21 (i) To be responsible for the entire care, supervision, and management of the career and
22 technical high school.

23 (ii) To recommend to the board of trustees educational policies to meet the needs of the
24 district, and to implement policies established by the board of trustees.

25 (iii) To present nominations to the board of trustees for assistant and associate directors
26 and to appoint all other school personnel.

27 (iv) To provide for the evaluation of all school district personnel.

28 (v) To establish a school based management approach for decision making for the operation
29 of the school.

30 (vi) To prepare a budget and participate in budget development as required in subsection
31 (i), and to authorize purchases consistent with the adopted school district budget.

32 (vii) To report to the board of trustees on a regular basis the financial condition and
33 operation of the school, and to report annually on the educational progress of the school.

34 (viii) To establish appropriate advisory committees as needed to provide guidance on new

1 directions and feedback on the operation of the school.

2 (i) With policy guidance from the board of trustees and extensive involvement of the
3 administrators and faculty in the school, the director of each regional school shall annually prepare
4 a budget. The board of trustees will approve the budget and transmit it to the commissioner. The
5 board of regents for elementary and secondary education, upon recommendation of the
6 commissioner of elementary and secondary education, shall provide parameters for the overall
7 budget request. Based on review and recommendation by the commissioner, the board of regents
8 shall approve the total budget and incorporate it into its budget request to the governor and to the
9 general assembly. Line item budgeting decisions shall be the responsibility of the director.

10 (j) The administration at regional vocational schools shall remain neutral regarding
11 unionization of any of its employees. To remain neutral, the administration shall not at any time
12 express a position on the matter of whether its employees should be unionized and shall not
13 threaten, intimidate, discriminate against, retaliate against or take any adverse action against any
14 employees based on their decision to support or oppose union representation. Provided further, the
15 administration at regional vocational schools shall not hire subcontractors to discuss unionization
16 with their employees.

17 ~~(j)~~(k) Nothing in this section shall be deemed to limit or interfere with the rights of teachers
18 and other school employees to bargain collectively pursuant to chapters 9.3 and 9.4 of title 28 or to
19 allow the board of trustees or the director to abrogate any agreement by collective bargaining.
20 Employees at the William M. Davies school shall continue to be state employees and the bargaining
21 units which are presently established at the school shall remain intact.

22 ~~(k)~~(l) Any tuition payments, which are made to the William M. Davies Career and
23 Technical high school from the district of residence of its students, as authorized in R.I.G.L. § 16-
24 7.2-5, shall be deposited into a restricted receipt account to be used for the same educational
25 purposes that its state appropriation is used. Any such funds shall be exempt from the indirect cost
26 recovery provisions of § 35-4-7.

27 SECTION 2. Chapter 16-45 of the General Laws entitled "Regional Vocational Schools
28 [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended by
29 adding thereto the following section:

30 **16-45-12. Severability clause.**

31 If any provision of this chapter or its application to any person or circumstances is held
32 invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this chapter that can be
33 given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of the
34 chapter are severable.

SECTION 3. Sections 16-77-2.1 and 16-77-3.1 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77 entitled "Establishment of Charter Public Schools " are hereby amended to read as follows:

16-77-2.1. Definitions.

As used in this chapter, the following words shall have the following meanings:

~~(5)~~(1) "Board of regents" means the Rhode Island board of regents for elementary and secondary education.

~~(2)~~ "Bona fide labor organization" means a labor organization recognized under the National Labor Relations Act or the provisions of chapter 7 of title 28 ("labor relations act").

~~(4)~~(3) "Charter public schools" means district charter schools, independent charter schools, or mayoral academies.

~~(6)~~(4) "Commissioner" means the Rhode Island commissioner of elementary and secondary education.

~~(4)~~(5) "District charter schools" means schools created by existing public schools, groups of public school personnel, public school districts, or a group of school districts.

~~(6)~~ "Employees" means non-represented, non-management, and non-confidential employees of a charter school.

~~(2)~~(7) "Independent charter schools" means schools created by: (I) Rhode Island nonprofit organizations provided that these nonprofit organizations shall have existed for at least two (2) years and must exist for a substantial reason other than to operate a school; or (ii) Colleges or universities within the State of Rhode Island.

~~(3)~~(8) "Mayoral academies" means schools created by a mayor of any city or town within the State of Rhode Island, acting by or through a nonprofit organization (regardless of the time said nonprofit organization is in existence) to establish a mayoral academy as hereinafter described in chapter 16-77.4 ("Mayoral Academies"). For purposes of this chapter the term "mayor" shall include any elected town administrator.

~~(7)~~(9) "Sending school district" means the district where the student attending or planning to attend a charter public school resides.

16-77-3.1. Legislative purpose.

(a) The purpose of this chapter is to provide an alternative within the public education system by offering opportunities for entities identified in § 16-77-2.1 to establish and maintain a high performing public school program according to the terms of a charter. The key appeal of the charter school concept is its promise of increased accountability for student achievement in exchange for increased school autonomy.

(b) Charter public schools are intended to be vanguards, laboratories, and an expression of

1 the on-going and vital state interest in the improvement of education. Notwithstanding the
2 provisions of this section or any law to the contrary, a charter school shall be deemed to be a public
3 school acting under state law and subject to the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 42 U.S.C. § 6101,
4 et seq., title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, et seq., title IX of the educational
5 amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681, et seq., § 794 of title 29, and part B of the Individuals With
6 Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1411, et seq. All students and prospective students of a
7 charter school shall be deemed to be public school students, having all the same rights under federal
8 and Rhode Island law as students and prospective students at a non-chartered public school. These
9 charter public schools shall be vehicles for research and development in areas such as curriculum,
10 pedagogy, administration, materials, facilities, governance, parent relations and involvement,
11 social development, instructor's and administrator's responsibilities, working conditions, student
12 performance and fiscal accountability. It is the intent of the general assembly to create within the
13 public school system vehicles for innovative learning opportunities to be utilized and evaluated in
14 pilot projects. The provisions of this chapter are to be interpreted liberally to support the purposes
15 set forth in this chapter and to advance a renewed commitment by the state to the mission, goals,
16 and diversity of public education.

17 (c) It is the intent of the general assembly to provide opportunities for teachers, parents,
18 pupils, and community members to establish and maintain public schools that operate
19 independently as a method to accomplish all of the following:

20 (1) Improve pupil learning by creating schools with rigorous academic standards in all
21 basic areas of instruction for high pupil performance;

22 (2) Increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded
23 learning experiences for pupils who are identified as educationally disadvantaged and at-risk;

24 (3) Encourage the use of innovative teaching methods;

25 (4) Create opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the
26 learning program at the school site;

27 (5) Provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational
28 opportunities that are available within the public school system;

29 (6) Hold the schools established under this chapter accountable for meeting publicly
30 promulgated, measurable, state and charter-based pupil academic results, and provide the schools
31 with a method to implement performance-based and/or other student-based accountability systems,
32 while providing a means to restrict the expansion of ineffective charter public schools; and

33 (7) Encourage parental and community involvement with public schools.

34 (d) No private or parochial schools shall be eligible for charter public school status, nor

1 shall a charter public school be affiliated in any way with a sectarian school or religious institution.
2 Any charter public school authorized by this chapter shall be nonsectarian and nonreligious in its
3 programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations. The board of
4 regents shall not approve a charter to a school whose overall operation or education program is
5 managed by a for profit entity.

6 (e) The commissioner is empowered to promulgate rules and regulations consistent with
7 this chapter, in conformance with chapter 35 of title 42, for the creation and operation of charter
8 public schools. These rules and regulations shall set forth the process for rescission of state approval
9 of a charter public school, including appropriate protections to ensure the continued provision of
10 education services to the students of the charter public school whose charter is rescinded.

11 (f) All charter public schools shall adhere to financial record keeping, reporting, auditing
12 requirements, and procedures as required by the Rhode Island department of education and in
13 accordance with federal and state laws and regulations.

14 (g) No more than thirty-five (35) charters shall be granted. At least one-half (½) of the total
15 number of charter public schools in the state shall be reserved for charter school applications which
16 are designed to increase the educational opportunities for at-risk pupils.

17 (h) Charter public schools shall remain neutral regarding unionization of any of its
18 employees by establishing a "union neutrality clause" to be included in the charter upon the renewal
19 of a certified charter public school or application for a new charter public school.

20 SECTION 4. Chapter 16-77 of the General Laws entitled "Establishment of Charter Public
21 Schools [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended
22 by adding thereto the following section:

23 **16-77-13. Severability clause.**

24 If any provision of this chapter or its application to any person or circumstances is held
25 invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this chapter that can be
26 given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of the
27 chapter are severable.

28 SECTION 5. Section 16-77.2-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77.2 entitled "District
29 Charter School [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby
30 amended to read as follows:

31 **16-77.2-2. Procedure for creation of district charter schools.**

32 (a) Any persons or entities eligible to establish a district charter school may submit a
33 proposed charter to the commissioner and the school committee of the district where the district
34 charter school is to be located. The proposed charter shall:

- 1 (1) Be submitted to the commissioner and to the school committee of the district where the
2 district charter school is to be located no later than December 1st of the school year before the
3 school year in which the district charter school is to be established;
- 4 (2) Describe a plan for education, including the mission, objective, method of providing a
5 basic education, measurable student academic goals that the district charter school will meet, and
6 process for improving student learning and fulfilling the charter and fulfilling state and national
7 educational goals and standards;
- 8 (3) Provide a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction to students per
9 year;
- 10 (4) Indicate performance criteria that will be used to measure student learning and to
11 comply with the charter, state, and national educational goals and standards;
- 12 (5) Include an agreement to provide a yearly report to parents, the community, the school
13 committee of the district where the district charter school is to be located, and the commissioner,
14 which indicates the progress made by the district charter school during the previous year in meeting
15 the charter objectives;
- 16 (6) Present a plan for the governance, administration, and operation of the district charter
17 school, including the manner in which the governing board of the school will be chosen, the nature
18 and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and
19 operation of the district charter school, and the means of ensuring accountability to the
20 commissioner, the school district of the district where the district charter school is to be located,
21 and the board of regents;
- 22 (7) Identify the building that will house the district charter school and from whom and
23 under what terms and conditions it is to be provided;
- 24 (8) Describe what support services will be provided by the school district and under what
25 terms and conditions those services are to be provided, and describe what support services the
26 district charter school will obtain directly from third-parties and, to the extent known, under what
27 terms and conditions those services are to be provided;
- 28 (9) Explain the procedures that will be followed to ensure the health and safety of pupils
29 and staff;
- 30 (10) Describe enrollment procedures including the permissible criteria for admission in
31 accordance with applicable state and federal law, along with a policy or policies that outline
32 outreach and recruitment programs to encourage the enrollment of a diverse student population;
- 33 (11) Explain the student discipline procedures;
- 34 (12) Explain the relationship that will exist between the proposed district charter school

1 and its employees, including the terms and conditions of employment and the qualifications that
2 the employees must meet. Teachers and administrators in district charter schools must be certified
3 pursuant to state law and regulation. Teachers and administrators in district charter schools shall be
4 entitled to prevailing wages and benefits as enjoyed by other public school teachers and
5 administrators within the school district where the district charter school is to be located and to the
6 state teachers' retirement system under chapter 8 of title 36. Employment in a district charter school
7 shall be considered "service" as that term is defined in chapter 16 of this title. All employees and
8 prospective employees of a district charter school shall be deemed to be public school employees,
9 having the same rights, including retirement, under Rhode Island and federal law as employees and
10 prospective employees at a non-chartered public school;

11 (13) Upon renewal of an existing certified charter or upon application for a new charter
12 school to create a "union neutrality clause" that provides that the charter school commits to the
13 following:

14 (i) To remain neutral, regarding the unionization of any of its employees, such that the
15 charter school shall not at any time express a position on the matter of whether its employees should
16 be unionized and such that the charter school shall not threaten, intimidate, discriminate against,
17 retaliate against, or take any adverse action against any employees based on their decision to
18 support or oppose union representation;

19 (ii) That the charter school shall provide any bona fide labor organization access at
20 reasonable times to areas in which the charter school's employees work for the purpose of meeting
21 with employees to discuss their right to representation, employment rights under the law, and terms
22 and conditions of employment; and

23 (iii) That union recognition shall be through a majority card check verified by a neutral
24 third-party arbitrator mutually selected by the charter school and the bona fide labor organization
25 through alternate striking from a panel of arbitrators provided by the Federal Mediation and
26 Conciliation Service.

27 ~~(13)~~(14) Identify with particularity the state statutes, state regulations, and school district
28 rules from which variances are sought in order to facilitate operation of the district charter school.
29 Explain the reasons for each variance and the alternative method by which the concern that gave
30 rise to the regulation or provision will be addressed;

31 ~~(14)~~(15) The proposed charter shall set forth those provisions of the collective bargaining
32 agreement which will not be applicable to that district charter school subject to agreement by the
33 parties to the collectively bargaining agreement;

34 ~~(15)~~(16) Provide a financial plan including a proposed budget for the term of the charter,

1 and an annual audit of the financial and administrative operations of the district charter school, and
2 the manner in which the funds allocated to the district charter school will be managed and
3 disbursed;

4 ~~(16)~~(17) Provide procedures by which teaching personnel and parents can legally challenge
5 decisions of the governing board of the school which do not conform to the school's charter; and

6 ~~(17)~~(18) Provide a copy of the proposed bylaws of the district charter school.

7 (b) In those instances where a charter is being sought for an existing public school, the
8 proposed charter must receive the affirmative votes of two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the teachers assigned to
9 the school prior to implementation. If approved by the faculty, the proposed charter shall be voted
10 on by the parents or legal guardians of each student assigned to the school, with one vote being cast
11 for each student. To be adopted by the parents, the proposed charter must receive the affirmative
12 votes of parents or legal guardians representing a majority of all the students assigned to the school.

13 (c) In those instances where a charter is being sought for a newly created district charter
14 school, the proposed charter must receive the affirmative support of a number of certified teachers
15 employed within the school district where the district charter school is to be located at least equal
16 to two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the number of teachers that will be required to staff the proposed district charter
17 school. The teachers who affirmatively support the proposed charter must state their desire to
18 transfer to the district charter school, once established, and to teach under the terms of the charter.
19 To demonstrate parental support within the school district, the charter must receive the affirmative
20 support of parents or legal guardians representing a number of students currently enrolled in the
21 school district equal to at least one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) of the number of students who would be needed to
22 attend the proposed district charter school. The parents or guardians must state their desire to have
23 their children transfer to the district charter school, once established, and to be educated under the
24 terms of the charter. The charter may then be presented by the commissioner to the board of regents
25 for its approval. The charter shall set forth those provisions of state statute, regulation, and school
26 district rules which will not be applicable to that district charter school

27 (d) By approval of the charter upon the recommendation of the commissioner, the board of
28 regents will be deemed to have authorized all necessary variances from law and regulation
29 enumerated in the charter. Should the need for relief from the operation of additional provisions of
30 law and/or contract become apparent subsequent to implementation of the charter, a variance may
31 be obtained by an affirmative vote of two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the teachers then assigned to the school,
32 agreement by all parties to the collective bargaining agreement and by an affirmative vote of the
33 board of regents upon a recommendation of the commissioner.

34 SECTION 6. Chapter 16-77.2 of the General Laws entitled "District Charter School [See

1 Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended by adding
2 thereto the following section:

3 **16-77.2-9. Severability clause.**

4 If any provision of this chapter or its application to any person or circumstances is held
5 invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this chapter that can be
6 given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of the
7 chapter are severable.

8 SECTION 7. Section 16-77.3-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77.3 entitled
9 "Independent Charter Schools [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education
10 Act]" is hereby amended to read as follows:

11 **16-77.3-2. Procedure for creation and expansion of independent charter schools.**

12 (a) Any persons or entities eligible to establish an independent charter public school may
13 submit a proposed charter, or an amendment to a charter for an expansion, to the commissioner.
14 For purposes of this chapter, "expansion" shall be an increase in total enrollment; an increase in
15 the grade levels previously authorized in the charter, or the addition of a school district to the
16 catchment area. The proposed charter shall:

17 (1) Be submitted to the commissioner no later than December 1st of the school year before
18 the school year in which the independent charter school is to be established;

19 (2) Describe a plan for education, including the mission, objective, method of providing a
20 basic education, measurable student academic goals that the independent charter school will meet,
21 and process for improving student learning and fulfilling the charter and fulfilling state and national
22 educational goals and standards;

23 (3) Provide a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction to students per
24 year;

25 (4) Indicate performance criteria that will be used to measure student learning and to
26 comply with the charter, state, and national educational goals and standards;

27 (5) Include an agreement to provide a yearly report to parents, the community, the sending
28 school districts, and the commissioner, that indicates the progress made by the independent charter
29 school during the previous year in meeting the charter objectives;

30 (6) Present a plan for the governance, administration, and operation of the independent
31 charter school, including the manner in which the governing board of the school will be chosen,
32 the nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the
33 governance and operation of the independent charter school, and the means of ensuring
34 accountability to the commissioner, the sending school districts, and the council on elementary and

1 secondary education;

2 (7) Identify the building that will house the independent charter school and from whom,

3 and under what terms and conditions, it is to be provided;

4 (8) Describe what support services will be provided by the sending school district(s), and

5 under what terms and conditions those services are to be provided, and describe what support

6 services the independent charter school will obtain directly from third parties and, to the extent

7 known, under what terms and conditions those services are to be provided;

8 (9) Explain the procedures that will be followed to ensure the health and safety of pupils

9 and staff;

10 (10) Describe enrollment procedures, including the permissible criteria for admission in

11 accordance with applicable state and federal law, along with a policy, or policies, that outline

12 outreach and recruitment programs to encourage the enrollment of a diverse student population;

13 (11) Explain the student discipline procedures;

14 (12) Explain the relationship that will exist between the proposed independent charter

15 school and its employees, including the terms and conditions of employment and the qualifications

16 that the employees must meet. Teachers and administrators in independent charter schools must be

17 certified pursuant to state law and regulation. Teachers and administrators in independent charter

18 schools shall be entitled to prevailing wages and benefits as enjoyed by other Rhode Island public

19 school teachers and administrators. Employment in an independent charter school shall be

20 considered “service” as that term is defined in chapter 16 of this title for purposes of determining

21 the appropriate step on a salary schedule for certified personnel. Employment in an independent

22 charter school can be considered “service” as that term is defined in chapter 16 of this title for

23 determining status in the teachers’ retirement system. All employees, and prospective employees

24 of an independent charter school shall be deemed to be public school employees, having the same

25 rights under Rhode Island and federal law as employees, and prospective employees at a non-

26 chartered public school;

27 (13) Requires all independent charter schools, upon renewal of a certified charter or

28 application for a new charter school to create a "union neutrality clause" that provides the

29 following:

30 (i) To remain neutral, regarding the unionization of any of its employees such that the

31 charter school shall not at any time express a position on the matter of whether its employees should

32 be unionized and such that the charter school shall not threaten, intimidate, discriminate against,

33 retaliate against, or take any adverse action against any employees based on their decision to

34 support or oppose union representation;

1 (ii) That the charter school shall provide any bona fide labor organization access at
2 reasonable times to areas in which the charter school's employees work for the purpose of meeting
3 with employees to discuss their right to representation, employment rights under the law, and terms
4 and conditions of employment; and

5 (iii) That union recognition shall be through a majority card check verified by a neutral
6 third-party arbitrator mutually selected by the charter school and the bona fide labor organization
7 through alternate striking from a panel of arbitrators provided by the Federal Mediation and
8 Conciliation Service.

9 ~~(13)~~(14) Identify, with particularity, the state statutes, state regulations, and sending school
10 district(s) rules from which variances are sought in order to facilitate operation of the independent
11 charter school. Explain the reasons for each variance and the alternative method by which the
12 concern that gave rise to the regulation or provision will be addressed;

13 ~~(14)~~(15) Provide a financial plan, including a proposed budget for the term of the charter,
14 and an annual audit of the financial and administrative operations of the independent charter school,
15 and the manner in which the funds allocated to the independent charter school will be managed and
16 disbursed;

17 ~~(15)~~(16) Provide procedures by which teaching personnel and parents can legally challenge
18 decisions of the governing board of the school that do not conform to the school's charter;

19 ~~(16)~~(17) Provide a copy of the proposed bylaws of the independent charter school; and

20 ~~(17)~~(18) Provide written support from town or city council(s) in the proposed catchment
21 area if required pursuant to § 16-77-5.1.

22 (b) Any nonprofit organization that seeks to establish an independent charter school must
23 submit its financial records and financial plan for operating the school to the auditor general, who
24 shall review the records, the financial plan, and the financial integrity of the organization. At the
25 time of submission of a proposed charter, the financial records and financial recordkeeping system
26 of the nonprofit organization and the proposed financial plan for the independent charter school
27 shall be reviewed by the auditor general and the auditor general shall, while the proposed charter
28 is being considered for preliminary approval by the council on elementary and secondary education,
29 provide an initial determination to the council on elementary and secondary education, the
30 commissioner, and the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate
31 indicating that the auditor general is satisfied that the nonprofit organization is financially
32 responsible. Final approval for operation of the independent charter school shall not be granted by
33 the council on elementary and secondary education until the auditor general has approved the
34 financial plan and financial-record keeping system and is satisfied that the nonprofit organization

1 is financially responsible. The auditor general shall notify the council on elementary and secondary
2 education, the commissioner, the president of the senate, and the speaker of the house of
3 representatives of the findings. During the year immediately preceding the September in which the
4 independent charter school is to begin operation, the charter applicant shall make any additional
5 submissions to the auditor general prescribed by the auditor general in the initial determination.
6 Additional submissions during the year prior to the September in which the independent charter
7 school is to begin operation shall include, but not be limited to evidence submitted to the auditor
8 general, not later than June 1st prior to the opening of the independent charter school, of the
9 existence of an agreement, option for lease or purchase, lease agreement, or purchase agreement,
10 contingent upon general assembly funding, for a facility in which the independent charter school
11 will operate in its first year of operation. The auditor general shall have the authority to review
12 independent charter schools affiliated with nonprofit organizations on an annual basis or require
13 the school to have an annual, certified audit in accordance with the same federal and state standards
14 that are applicable to local public school districts. If, as a result of any annual audit, the auditor
15 general believes there are financial irregularities, the auditor general shall withdraw the original
16 approval and the council on elementary and secondary education shall withdraw its approval for
17 the independent charter school to continue operation.

18 SECTION 8. Chapter 16-77.3 of the General Laws entitled "Independent Charter Schools
19 [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended by
20 adding thereto the following section:

21 **16-77.3-9. Severability clause.**

22 If any provision of this chapter or its application to any person or circumstances is held
23 invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this chapter that can be
24 given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of the
25 chapter are severable.

26 SECTION 9. Section 16-77.4-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77.4 entitled "Mayoral
27 Academies [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby
28 amended to read as follows:

29 **16-77.4-2. Procedure for creation and expansion of a mayoral academy.**

30 (a) Any persons or entities eligible to establish a mayoral academy may submit a proposed
31 charter, or an amendment to a charter for an expansion, to the commissioner. For purposes of this
32 chapter, "expansion" shall be an increase in total enrollment; an increase in the grade levels
33 previously authorized in the charter; or the addition of a school district to the catchment area. The
34 proposed charter shall:

- 1 (1) Be submitted to the commissioner no later than December 1st of the school year before
2 the school year in which the mayoral academy is to be established;
- 3 (2) Describe a plan for education, including the mission, objective, method of providing a
4 basic education, measurable student academic goals that the mayoral academy will meet, and
5 process for improving student learning and fulfilling the charter and fulfilling state and national
6 educational goals and standards;
- 7 (3) Provide a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction to students per
8 year;
- 9 (4) Indicate performance criteria that will be used to measure student learning and to
10 comply with the charter, state, and national educational goals and standards;
- 11 (5) Include an agreement to provide a yearly report to parents, the community, the school
12 committee of the sending districts, and the commissioner, that indicates the progress made by the
13 mayoral academy during the previous year in meeting the charter objectives;
- 14 (6) Present a plan for the governance, administration, and operation of the mayoral
15 academy, including the manner in which the governing board of the school will be chosen, the
16 nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance
17 and operation of the mayoral academy, and the means of ensuring accountability to the
18 commissioner, the sending school district(s), and the council on elementary and secondary
19 education;
- 20 (7) Identify the building that will house the mayoral academy and from whom and under
21 what terms and conditions it is to be provided;
- 22 (8) Describe what support services will be provided by the sending school district(s) and
23 under what terms and conditions those services are to be provided, and describe what support
24 services the mayoral academy will obtain directly from third parties and, to the extent known, under
25 what terms and conditions those services are to be provided;
- 26 (9) Explain the procedures that will be followed to ensure the health and safety of pupils
27 and staff;
- 28 (10) Describe enrollment procedures, including the permissible criteria for admission in
29 accordance with applicable state and federal law, along with a policy, or policies, that outline
30 outreach and recruitment programs to encourage the enrollment of a diverse student population;
- 31 (11) Explain the student discipline procedures;
- 32 (12) Explain the relationship that will exist between the proposed mayoral academy and its
33 employees, including the terms and conditions of employment and the qualifications that the
34 employees must meet. Teachers and administrators in mayoral academies must be certified

1 pursuant to state law and regulation.

2 (13) Each mayoral academy established pursuant to this chapter may, by written notice to
3 the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, elect to have this subsection apply (or
4 not apply) to its teachers, administrators, and employees:

5 (i) Teachers and administrators in a mayoral academy shall be entitled to prevailing wages
6 and benefits as enjoyed by other public school teachers and administrators;

7 (ii) Teachers and administrators in a mayoral academy shall be entitled to participate in the
8 state teachers' retirement system under chapter 8 of title 36;

9 (iii) Employment in a mayoral academy shall be considered "service" as that term is
10 defined in chapter 16 of this title.

11 (14) Identify, with particularity, the state laws, state regulations, and school district rules
12 from which variances are sought in order to facilitate operation of the mayoral academy. Explain
13 the reasons for each variance and the alternative method by which the concern that gave rise to the
14 regulation or provision will be addressed;

15 (15) Provide a financial plan, including a proposed budget for the term of the charter, and
16 an annual audit of the financial and administrative operations of the mayoral academy, and the
17 manner in which the funds allocated to the mayoral academy will be managed and disbursed;

18 (16) Provide procedures by which teaching personnel and parents can legally challenge
19 decisions of the governing board of the mayoral academy that do not conform to the mayoral
20 academy's charter;

21 (17) Provide a copy of the proposed bylaws of the mayoral academy; ~~and~~

22 (18) Provide written support from the town or city council(s) in the proposed catchment
23 area if required pursuant to § 16-77-5.1; and

24 (19) Requires all mayoral academies, upon renewal of a certified charter or application for
25 a new charter or expansion to create a "union neutrality clause" that provides the following:

26 (i) To remain neutral, regarding the unionization of any of its employees such that the
27 mayoral academy shall not at any time express a position on the matter of whether its employees
28 should be unionized and such that the mayoral academy shall not threaten, intimidate, discriminate
29 against, retaliate against, or take any adverse action against any employees based on their decision
30 to support or oppose union representation;

31 (ii) That the mayoral academy shall provide any bona fide labor organization access at
32 reasonable times to areas in which the mayoral academy's employees work for the purpose of
33 meeting with employees to discuss their right to representation, employment rights under the law,
34 and terms and conditions of employment; and

1 (iii) That union recognition shall be through a majority card check verified by a neutral
2 third-party arbitrator mutually selected by the mayoral academy and the bona fide labor
3 organization through alternate striking from a panel of arbitrators provided by the Federal
4 Mediation and Conciliation Service.

5 SECTION 10. Chapter 16-77.4 of the General Laws entitled "Mayoral Academies [See
6 Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended by adding
7 thereto the following section:

8 **16-77.4-9. Severability clause.**

9 If any provision of this chapter or its application to any person or circumstances is held
10 invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this chapter that can be
11 given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of the
12 chapter are severable.

13 SECTION 11. Section 16-114-4 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-114 entitled "Sheila C.
14 “Skip” Nowell Academy." is hereby amended to read as follows:

15 **16-114-4. Board of trustees.**

16 (a) The academy shall be governed by a board of trustees that shall have the powers and
17 duties of a school committee. The board of trustees of the academy on the date of passage of this
18 legislation shall constitute the founding board of trustees of the academy. The council on
19 elementary and secondary education shall thereafter appoint the members of the board of trustees
20 from nominations made by the commissioner of elementary and secondary education. The
21 chairperson of the board of trustees shall also be selected in this manner. The council on elementary
22 and secondary education shall determine the qualifications and terms of office of members of the
23 board of trustees.

24 (b) The academy shall remain neutral regarding unionization of any of its employees. To
25 remain neutral, the academy shall not at any time express a position on the matter of whether its
26 employees should be unionized and shall not threaten, intimidate, discriminate against, retaliate
27 against, or take any adverse action against any employees based on their decision to support or
28 oppose union representation. Provided further, the academy shall not hire subcontractors to discuss
29 unionization with their employees.

30 SECTION 12. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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LC001636/SUB A
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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- REGIONAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS--
ESTABLISHMENT OF CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- 1 This act would require all certified independent or district charter schools upon application
- 2 for a renewal of said charter or an application for a new charter school to provide a union neutrality
- 3 clause in the charter.
- 4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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LC001636/SUB A
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Exhibit E

<https://perma.cc/5RBY-6DYG>

2026 -- S 2787 SUBSTITUTE A AS AMENDED

LC005597/SUB A

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- ESTABLISHMENT OF CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Introduced By: Senators Murray, Thompson, Patalano, Ciccone, Urso, Bissaillon,
Pearson, McKenney, and Zurier
Date Introduced: March 04, 2026

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 16-77-3.1 and 16-77-5.1 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77
2 entitled "Establishment of Charter Public Schools [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island
3 Board of Education Act]" are hereby amended to read as follows:

4 **16-77-3.1. Legislative purpose.**

5 (a) The purpose of this chapter is to provide an alternative within the public education
6 system by offering opportunities for entities identified in § 16-77-2.1 to establish and maintain a
7 high performing public school program according to the terms of a charter. The key appeal of the
8 charter school concept is its promise of increased accountability for student achievement in
9 exchange for increased school autonomy.

10 (b) Charter public schools are intended to be vanguards, laboratories, and an expression of
11 the on-going and vital state interest in the improvement of education. Notwithstanding the
12 provisions of this section or any law to the contrary, a charter school shall be deemed to be a public
13 school acting under state law and subject to the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 42 U.S.C. § 6101,
14 et seq., title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, et seq., title IX of the educational
15 amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681, et seq., § 794 of title 29, and part B of the Individuals With
16 Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1411, et seq. All students and prospective students of a
17 charter school shall be deemed to be public school students, having all the same rights under federal
18 and Rhode Island law as students and prospective students at a non-chartered public school. These
19 charter public schools shall be vehicles for research and development in areas such as curriculum,

1 pedagogy, administration, materials, facilities, governance, parent relations and involvement,
2 social development, instructor's and administrator's responsibilities, working conditions, student
3 performance and fiscal accountability. It is the intent of the general assembly to create within the
4 public school system vehicles for innovative learning opportunities to be utilized and evaluated in
5 pilot projects. The provisions of this chapter are to be interpreted liberally to support the purposes
6 set forth in this chapter and to advance a renewed commitment by the state to the mission, goals,
7 and diversity of public education.

8 (c) It is the intent of the general assembly to provide opportunities for teachers, parents,
9 pupils, and community members to establish and maintain public schools that operate
10 independently as a method to accomplish all of the following:

11 (1) Improve pupil learning by creating schools with rigorous academic standards in all
12 basic areas of instruction for high pupil performance;

13 (2) Increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded
14 learning experiences for pupils who are identified as educationally disadvantaged and at-risk;

15 (3) Encourage the use of innovative teaching methods;

16 (4) Create opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the
17 learning program at the school site;

18 (5) Provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational
19 opportunities that are available within the public school system;

20 (6) Hold the schools established under this chapter accountable for meeting publicly
21 promulgated, measurable, state and charter-based pupil academic results, and provide the schools
22 with a method to implement performance-based and/or other student-based accountability systems,
23 while providing a means to restrict the expansion of ineffective charter public schools; and

24 (7) Encourage parental and community involvement with public schools.

25 (d) No private or parochial schools shall be eligible for charter public school status, nor
26 shall a charter public school be affiliated in any way with a sectarian school or religious institution.
27 Any charter public school authorized by this chapter shall be nonsectarian and nonreligious in its
28 programs, admissions policies, employment practices, and all other operations. The board of
29 regents shall not approve a charter to a school whose overall operation or education program is
30 managed by a for profit entity.

31 (e) The commissioner is empowered to promulgate rules and regulations consistent with
32 this chapter, in conformance with chapter 35 of title 42, for the creation and operation of charter
33 public schools. These rules and regulations shall set forth the process for rescission of state approval
34 of a charter public school, including appropriate protections to ensure the continued provision of

1 education services to the students of the charter public school whose charter is rescinded.

2 (f) All charter public schools shall adhere to financial record keeping, reporting, auditing
3 requirements, and procedures as required by the Rhode Island department of education and in
4 accordance with federal and state laws and regulations.

5 (g) No more than ~~thirty-five (35)~~ twenty-eight (28) charters shall be granted. At least one-
6 half (½) of the total number of charter public schools in the state shall be reserved for charter school
7 applications which are designed to increase the educational opportunities for at-risk pupils.

8 (h) The council on elementary and secondary education shall not grant final approval for
9 the creation or expansion of any district charter school, independent charter school or mayoral
10 academy charter school to begin operation in the 2026-2027, 2027-2028, or 2028-2029 school
11 years.

12 **16-77-5.1. Oversight by commissioner.**

13 (a) Individuals or groups may complain to a charter public school's governing body
14 concerning any claimed violation of the provisions of this chapter by the school. If, after presenting
15 their complaint to the governing body, the individuals or groups believe their complaint has not
16 been adequately addressed, they may submit their complaint to the commissioner who shall hear
17 and decide the issue pursuant to §§ 16-39-1 and 16-39-2.

18 (b) Charter public school approval for establishment or continuation shall be for up to a
19 five-year (5) period. In either case, council on elementary and secondary education approval is
20 required.

21 (c) Local, written support shall be required for a proposed charter that is a network charter
22 school as defined herein. "Written support" means a resolution or ordinance granted by the town
23 or city council for each proposed sending district where the council considers the fiscal and
24 educational welfare of the municipality and students after at least one public hearing.

25 (d) A charter public school, as defined in § 16-77-2.1, shall be considered a network
26 charter school if the charter public school encompasses, or will encompass, elementary and
27 secondary schools or multiple elementary or multiple secondary schools.

28 (e) Charter public schools, as defined in § 16-77-2.1(4) and authorized as of the effective
29 date of this act [July 13, 2016], shall be exempt from subsection (c) of this section and shall not
30 require local, written support under subsection (c) for any proposed expansion or charter renewal.

31 (f) A proposed charter, or amendment to a charter for expansion, may proceed through the
32 approval process by removing districts that have not provided written support, in accordance with
33 this section, from the catchment area and may be approved with the remaining districts in the
34 catchment area, provided that the application satisfies the requirements of regulations and law.

1 However, the charter may be revoked at any time if the school:

2 (1) Materially violates provisions contained in the charter;

3 (2) Fails to meet or pursue the educational objectives contained in the charter;

4 (3) Fails to comply with fiscal accountability procedures as specified in the charter;

5 (4) Violates provisions of law that have not been granted variance by the council on

6 elementary and secondary education; or

7 (5) After three (3) consecutive years of operation, is not a “high-performing charter

8 school,” defined as a charter public school that has demonstrated overall success, including: (i)

9 Substantial progress in improving student achievement; and (ii) The management and leadership

10 necessary to establish a thriving, financially viable charter public school.

11 (g) After denying, or prior to non-renewing or revoking a charter, the department of

12 elementary and secondary education will hold a hearing on the issues in controversy under § 16-

13 39-1.

14 (h) The establishment of new charter public schools shall be contingent upon state approval

15 and appropriation. [The state shall not approve or appropriate funding to any new charter school or](#)

16 [to expand an existing charter school that has not received final approval by the council on](#)

17 [elementary or secondary education for the fiscal year 2026-2027, fiscal year 2027-2028, or fiscal](#)

18 [year 2028-2029.](#)

19 SECTION 2. Section 16-77.2-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77.2 entitled "District

20 Charter School [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby

21 amended to read as follows:

22 **16-77.2-2. Procedure for creation of district charter schools.**

23 (a) Any persons or entities eligible to establish a district charter school may submit a

24 proposed charter to the commissioner and the school committee of the district where the district

25 charter school is to be located. The proposed charter shall:

26 (1) Be submitted to the commissioner and to the school committee of the district where the

27 district charter school is to be located no later than December 1st of the school year before the

28 school year in which the district charter school is to be established;

29 (2) Describe a plan for education, including the mission, objective, method of providing a

30 basic education, measurable student academic goals that the district charter school will meet, and

31 process for improving student learning and fulfilling the charter and fulfilling state and national

32 educational goals and standards;

33 (3) Provide a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction to students per

34 year;

1 (4) Indicate performance criteria that will be used to measure student learning and to
2 comply with the charter, state, and national educational goals and standards;

3 (5) Include an agreement to provide a yearly report to parents, the community, the school
4 committee of the district where the district charter school is to be located, and the commissioner,
5 which indicates the progress made by the district charter school during the previous year in meeting
6 the charter objectives;

7 (6) Present a plan for the governance, administration, and operation of the district charter
8 school, including the manner in which the governing board of the school will be chosen, the nature
9 and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance and
10 operation of the district charter school, and the means of ensuring accountability to the
11 commissioner, the school district of the district where the district charter school is to be located,
12 and the board of regents;

13 (7) Identify the building that will house the district charter school and from whom and
14 under what terms and conditions it is to be provided;

15 (8) Describe what support services will be provided by the school district and under what
16 terms and conditions those services are to be provided, and describe what support services the
17 district charter school will obtain directly from third-parties and, to the extent known, under what
18 terms and conditions those services are to be provided;

19 (9) Explain the procedures that will be followed to ensure the health and safety of pupils
20 and staff;

21 (10) Describe enrollment procedures including the permissible criteria for admission in
22 accordance with applicable state and federal law, along with a policy or policies that outline
23 outreach and recruitment programs to encourage the enrollment of a diverse student population;

24 (11) Explain the student discipline procedures;

25 (12) Explain the relationship that will exist between the proposed district charter school
26 and its employees, including the terms and conditions of employment and the qualifications that
27 the employees must meet. Teachers and administrators in district charter schools must be certified
28 pursuant to state law and regulation. Teachers and administrators in district charter schools shall be
29 entitled to prevailing wages and benefits as enjoyed by other public school teachers and
30 administrators within the school district where the district charter school is to be located and to the
31 state teachers' retirement system under chapter 8 of title 36. Employment in a district charter school
32 shall be considered "service" as that term is defined in chapter 16 of this title. All employees and
33 prospective employees of a district charter school shall be deemed to be public school employees,
34 having the same rights, including retirement, under Rhode Island and federal law as employees and

1 prospective employees at a non-chartered public school.

2 (13) Identify with particularity the state statutes, state regulations, and school district rules
3 from which variances are sought in order to facilitate operation of the district charter school.
4 Explain the reasons for each variance and the alternative method by which the concern that gave
5 rise to the regulation or provision will be addressed;

6 (14) The proposed charter shall set forth those provisions of the collective bargaining
7 agreement which will not be applicable to that district charter school subject to agreement by the
8 parties to the collectively bargaining agreement;

9 (15) Provide a financial plan including a proposed budget for the term of the charter, and
10 an annual audit of the financial and administrative operations of the district charter school, and the
11 manner in which the funds allocated to the district charter school will be managed and disbursed;

12 (16) Provide procedures by which teaching personnel and parents can legally challenge
13 decisions of the governing board of the school which do not conform to the school's charter; and

14 (17) Provide a copy of the proposed bylaws of the district charter school.

15 (b) In those instances where a charter is being sought for an existing public school, the
16 proposed charter must receive the affirmative votes of two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the teachers assigned to
17 the school prior to implementation. If approved by the faculty, the proposed charter shall be voted
18 on by the parents or legal guardians of each student assigned to the school, with one vote being cast
19 for each student. To be adopted by the parents, the proposed charter must receive the affirmative
20 votes of parents or legal guardians representing a majority of all the students assigned to the school.

21 (c) In those instances where a charter is being sought for a newly created district charter
22 school, the proposed charter must receive the affirmative support of a number of certified teachers
23 employed within the school district where the district charter school is to be located at least equal
24 to two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the number of teachers that will be required to staff the proposed district charter
25 school. The teachers who affirmatively support the proposed charter must state their desire to
26 transfer to the district charter school, once established, and to teach under the terms of the charter.
27 To demonstrate parental support within the school district, the charter must receive the affirmative
28 support of parents or legal guardians representing a number of students currently enrolled in the
29 school district equal to at least one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) of the number of students who would be needed to
30 attend the proposed district charter school. The parents or guardians must state their desire to have
31 their children transfer to the district charter school, once established, and to be educated under the
32 terms of the charter. The charter may then be presented by the commissioner to the board of regents
33 for its approval. The charter shall set forth those provisions of state statute, regulation, and school
34 district rules which will not be applicable to that district charter school

(d) By approval of the charter upon the recommendation of the commissioner, the board of regents will be deemed to have authorized all necessary variances from law and regulation enumerated in the charter. Should the need for relief from the operation of additional provisions of law and/or contract become apparent subsequent to implementation of the charter, a variance may be obtained by an affirmative vote of two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) of the teachers then assigned to the school, agreement by all parties to the collective bargaining agreement and by an affirmative vote of the board of regents upon a recommendation of the commissioner.

(e) The council on elementary and secondary education shall not grant preliminary approval or final approval for the creation or expansion of any district charter school to begin operation in the 2026-2027, 2027-2028, or 2028-2029 school years.

SECTION 3. Section 16-77.3-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77.3 entitled "Independent Charter Schools [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended to read as follows:

16-77.3-2. Procedure for creation and expansion of independent charter schools.

(a) Any persons or entities eligible to establish an independent charter public school may submit a proposed charter, or an amendment to a charter for an expansion, to the commissioner. For purposes of this chapter, "expansion" shall be an increase in total enrollment; an increase in the grade levels previously authorized in the charter, or the addition of a school district to the catchment area. The proposed charter shall:

(1) Be submitted to the commissioner no later than December 1st of the school year before the school year in which the independent charter school is to be established;

(2) Describe a plan for education, including the mission, objective, method of providing a basic education, measurable student academic goals that the independent charter school will meet, and process for improving student learning and fulfilling the charter and fulfilling state and national educational goals and standards;

(3) Provide a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction to students per year;

(4) Indicate performance criteria that will be used to measure student learning and to comply with the charter, state, and national educational goals and standards;

(5) Include an agreement to provide a yearly report to parents, the community, the sending school districts, and the commissioner, that indicates the progress made by the independent charter school during the previous year in meeting the charter objectives;

(6) Present a plan for the governance, administration, and operation of the independent charter school, including the manner in which the governing board of the school will be chosen,

1 the nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the
2 governance and operation of the independent charter school, and the means of ensuring
3 accountability to the commissioner, the sending school districts, and the council on elementary and
4 secondary education;

5 (7) Identify the building that will house the independent charter school and from whom,
6 and under what terms and conditions, it is to be provided;

7 (8) Describe what support services will be provided by the sending school district(s), and
8 under what terms and conditions those services are to be provided, and describe what support
9 services the independent charter school will obtain directly from third parties and, to the extent
10 known, under what terms and conditions those services are to be provided;

11 (9) Explain the procedures that will be followed to ensure the health and safety of pupils
12 and staff;

13 (10) Describe enrollment procedures, including the permissible criteria for admission in
14 accordance with applicable state and federal law, along with a policy, or policies, that outline
15 outreach and recruitment programs to encourage the enrollment of a diverse student population;

16 (11) Explain the student discipline procedures;

17 (12) Explain the relationship that will exist between the proposed independent charter
18 school and its employees, including the terms and conditions of employment and the qualifications
19 that the employees must meet. Teachers and administrators in independent charter schools must be
20 certified pursuant to state law and regulation. Teachers and administrators in independent charter
21 schools shall be entitled to prevailing wages and benefits as enjoyed by other Rhode Island public
22 school teachers and administrators. Employment in an independent charter school shall be
23 considered “service” as that term is defined in chapter 16 of this title for purposes of determining
24 the appropriate step on a salary schedule for certified personnel. Employment in an independent
25 charter school can be considered “service” as that term is defined in chapter 16 of this title for
26 determining status in the teachers’ retirement system. All employees, and prospective employees
27 of an independent charter school shall be deemed to be public school employees, having the same
28 rights under Rhode Island and federal law as employees, and prospective employees at a non-
29 chartered public school;

30 (13) Identify, with particularity, the state statutes, state regulations, and sending school
31 district(s) rules from which variances are sought in order to facilitate operation of the independent
32 charter school. Explain the reasons for each variance and the alternative method by which the
33 concern that gave rise to the regulation or provision will be addressed;

34 (14) Provide a financial plan, including a proposed budget for the term of the charter, and

1 an annual audit of the financial and administrative operations of the independent charter school,
2 and the manner in which the funds allocated to the independent charter school will be managed and
3 disbursed;

4 (15) Provide procedures by which teaching personnel and parents can legally challenge
5 decisions of the governing board of the school that do not conform to the school's charter;

6 (16) Provide a copy of the proposed bylaws of the independent charter school; and

7 (17) Provide written support from town or city council(s) in the proposed catchment area
8 if required pursuant to § 16-77-5.1.

9 (b) Any nonprofit organization that seeks to establish an independent charter school must
10 submit its financial records and financial plan for operating the school to the auditor general, who
11 shall review the records, the financial plan, and the financial integrity of the organization. At the
12 time of submission of a proposed charter, the financial records and financial recordkeeping system
13 of the nonprofit organization and the proposed financial plan for the independent charter school
14 shall be reviewed by the auditor general and the auditor general shall, while the proposed charter
15 is being considered for preliminary approval by the council on elementary and secondary education,
16 provide an initial determination to the council on elementary and secondary education, the
17 commissioner, and the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate
18 indicating that the auditor general is satisfied that the nonprofit organization is financially
19 responsible. Final approval for operation of the independent charter school shall not be granted by
20 the council on elementary and secondary education until the auditor general has approved the
21 financial plan and financial-record keeping system and is satisfied that the nonprofit organization
22 is financially responsible. The auditor general shall notify the council on elementary and secondary
23 education, the commissioner, the president of the senate, and the speaker of the house of
24 representatives of the findings. During the year immediately preceding the September in which the
25 independent charter school is to begin operation, the charter applicant shall make any additional
26 submissions to the auditor general prescribed by the auditor general in the initial determination.
27 Additional submissions during the year prior to the September in which the independent charter
28 school is to begin operation shall include, but not be limited to evidence submitted to the auditor
29 general, not later than June 1st prior to the opening of the independent charter school, of the
30 existence of an agreement, option for lease or purchase, lease agreement, or purchase agreement,
31 contingent upon general assembly funding, for a facility in which the independent charter school
32 will operate in its first year of operation. The auditor general shall have the authority to review
33 independent charter schools affiliated with nonprofit organizations on an annual basis or require
34 the school to have an annual, certified audit in accordance with the same federal and state standards

1 that are applicable to local public school districts. If, as a result of any annual audit, the auditor
2 general believes there are financial irregularities, the auditor general shall withdraw the original
3 approval and the council on elementary and secondary education shall withdraw its approval for
4 the independent charter school to continue operation.

5 (c) The council on elementary and secondary education shall not grant preliminary
6 approval or final approval for the creation or expansion of any independent charter school to begin
7 operation in the 2026-2027, 2027-2028, or 2028-2029 school years.

8 SECTION 4. Section 16-77.4-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-77.4 entitled "Mayoral
9 Academies [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby
10 amended to read as follows:

11 **16-77.4-2. Procedure for creation and expansion of a mayoral academy.**

12 (a) Any persons or entities eligible to establish a mayoral academy may submit a proposed
13 charter, or an amendment to a charter for an expansion, to the commissioner. For purposes of this
14 chapter, "expansion" shall be an increase in total enrollment; an increase in the grade levels
15 previously authorized in the charter; or the addition of a school district to the catchment area. The
16 proposed charter shall:

17 (1) Be submitted to the commissioner no later than December 1st of the school year before
18 the school year in which the mayoral academy is to be established;

19 (2) Describe a plan for education, including the mission, objective, method of providing a
20 basic education, measurable student academic goals that the mayoral academy will meet, and
21 process for improving student learning and fulfilling the charter and fulfilling state and national
22 educational goals and standards;

23 (3) Provide a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction to students per
24 year;

25 (4) Indicate performance criteria that will be used to measure student learning and to
26 comply with the charter, state, and national educational goals and standards;

27 (5) Include an agreement to provide a yearly report to parents, the community, the school
28 committee of the sending districts, and the commissioner, that indicates the progress made by the
29 mayoral academy during the previous year in meeting the charter objectives;

30 (6) Present a plan for the governance, administration, and operation of the mayoral
31 academy, including the manner in which the governing board of the school will be chosen, the
32 nature and extent of parental, professional educator, and community involvement in the governance
33 and operation of the mayoral academy, and the means of ensuring accountability to the
34 commissioner, the sending school district(s), and the council on elementary and secondary

1 education;

2 (7) Identify the building that will house the mayoral academy and from whom and under

3 what terms and conditions it is to be provided;

4 (8) Describe what support services will be provided by the sending school district(s) and

5 under what terms and conditions those services are to be provided, and describe what support

6 services the mayoral academy will obtain directly from third parties and, to the extent known, under

7 what terms and conditions those services are to be provided;

8 (9) Explain the procedures that will be followed to ensure the health and safety of pupils

9 and staff;

10 (10) Describe enrollment procedures, including the permissible criteria for admission in

11 accordance with applicable state and federal law, along with a policy, or policies, that outline

12 outreach and recruitment programs to encourage the enrollment of a diverse student population;

13 (11) Explain the student discipline procedures;

14 (12) Explain the relationship that will exist between the proposed mayoral academy and its

15 employees, including the terms and conditions of employment and the qualifications that the

16 employees must meet. Teachers and administrators in mayoral academies must be certified

17 pursuant to state law and regulation.

18 (13) Each mayoral academy established pursuant to this chapter may, by written notice to

19 the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, elect to have this subsection apply (or

20 not apply) to its teachers, administrators, and employees:

21 (i) Teachers and administrators in a mayoral academy shall be entitled to prevailing wages

22 and benefits as enjoyed by other public school teachers and administrators;

23 (ii) Teachers and administrators in a mayoral academy shall be entitled to participate in the

24 state teachers' retirement system under chapter 8 of title 36;

25 (iii) Employment in a mayoral academy shall be considered "service" as that term is

26 defined in chapter 16 of this title.

27 (14) Identify, with particularity, the state laws, state regulations, and school district rules

28 from which variances are sought in order to facilitate operation of the mayoral academy. Explain

29 the reasons for each variance and the alternative method by which the concern that gave rise to the

30 regulation or provision will be addressed;

31 (15) Provide a financial plan, including a proposed budget for the term of the charter, and

32 an annual audit of the financial and administrative operations of the mayoral academy, and the

33 manner in which the funds allocated to the mayoral academy will be managed and disbursed;

34 (16) Provide procedures by which teaching personnel and parents can legally challenge

1 decisions of the governing board of the mayoral academy that do not conform to the mayoral
2 academy's charter;

3 (17) Provide a copy of the proposed bylaws of the mayoral academy; and

4 (18) Provide written support from the town or city council(s) in the proposed catchment
5 area if required pursuant to § 16-77-5.1.

6 (b) The council on elementary and secondary education shall not grant preliminary
7 approval or final approval for the creation or expansion of any mayoral academy charter school to
8 begin operation in the 2026-2027, 2027-2028, or 2028-2029 school years.

9 SECTION 5. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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LC005597/SUB A
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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- ESTABLISHMENT OF CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

- 1 This act would prevent the council on elementary and secondary education from granting
2 preliminary approval or final approval for the creation or expansion of any district charter school,
3 independent charter school or mayoral academy charter school beginning operations in 2026-2027,
4 2027-2028, or 2028-2029 school years. This act would also prevent the state from approving or
5 appropriating funding to any new charter school or to expand an existing charter school that has
6 not been approved by the council on elementary or secondary education prior to July 01, 2025 for
7 fiscal year 2026-2027, fiscal year 2027-2028, or fiscal year 2028-2028.
- 8 This act would take effect upon passage.

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LC005597/SUB A

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Exhibit F

<https://perma.cc/T7TZ-D9XC>



October 1, 2025

Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminster St.
Providence, RI 02903

Via Email

Dear Members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education,

The National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI) is writing in firm opposition to the proposed New England Technical Academy. While the proposal asserts that, as a statewide charter, NETA “will not have a significantly negative impact on any single district or existing CTE program,” the reality is far different. Rhode Island public school districts are building and sustaining their own career and technical education (CTE) programs, and the financial drain caused by this charter would directly undermine those efforts, jeopardizing both programming and access for students.

Rhode Island already offers strong, high-quality CTE options. District programs at East Providence High School and Newport’s Rogers High School, and state programs at institutions such as Davies Career and Technical High School, are thriving because of sustained state investment. Moreover, districts including Bristol-Warren and South Kingstown are in the midst of new construction designed specifically to expand access to CTE seats. These programs already have the infrastructure, leadership, and proven records of student success.

If there is demand for new CTE pathways, those programs should be incorporated into existing schools—not funneled into a duplicative system that diverts resources away from what is working. Approving this charter would not expand opportunity; it would splinter it. Rather than strengthening Rhode Island’s public schools, the Council would be redirecting taxpayer dollars into a parallel bureaucracy tied to a private, for-profit institution whose fortunes are dependent on market volatility and not the public good.

Simply put: approval of this charter would duplicate programming, waste public investment, and destabilize local district programs. It would make it harder for communities to grow the high-quality CTE opportunities students are demanding and that our economy requires.

NEARI supports both college preparatory and CTE pathways. In fact, Rhode Island has become a national example: a [recent article](#) from *The 74* highlighted Cranston’s success in preparing students for both higher education and the workforce. This is where state energy and investment should be directed—toward scaling proven models within the district public school system.

Parents and students want more CTE options, and so do we. But the answer is not to establish a new statewide charter that will require additional administrators with six-figure salaries, siphon off taxpayer resources, and inevitably funnel students toward New England Tech, even when CCRI, RIC, URI, or local

trade programs may be the better fit. The Council must recognize the inherent conflict in handing Rhode Island's workforce development pipeline to a private institution whose primary obligation is not to students, but to its own bottom line.

Approving this charter would weaken our public school districts, destabilize our shared CTE infrastructure, and tie the state's workforce future to a private entity. For these reasons, we urge you to reject the New England Tech Academy charter application and instead commit to expanding CTE opportunities through Rhode Island's public schools, where transparency, accountability, and equity remain at the core of the mission.

Sincerely,

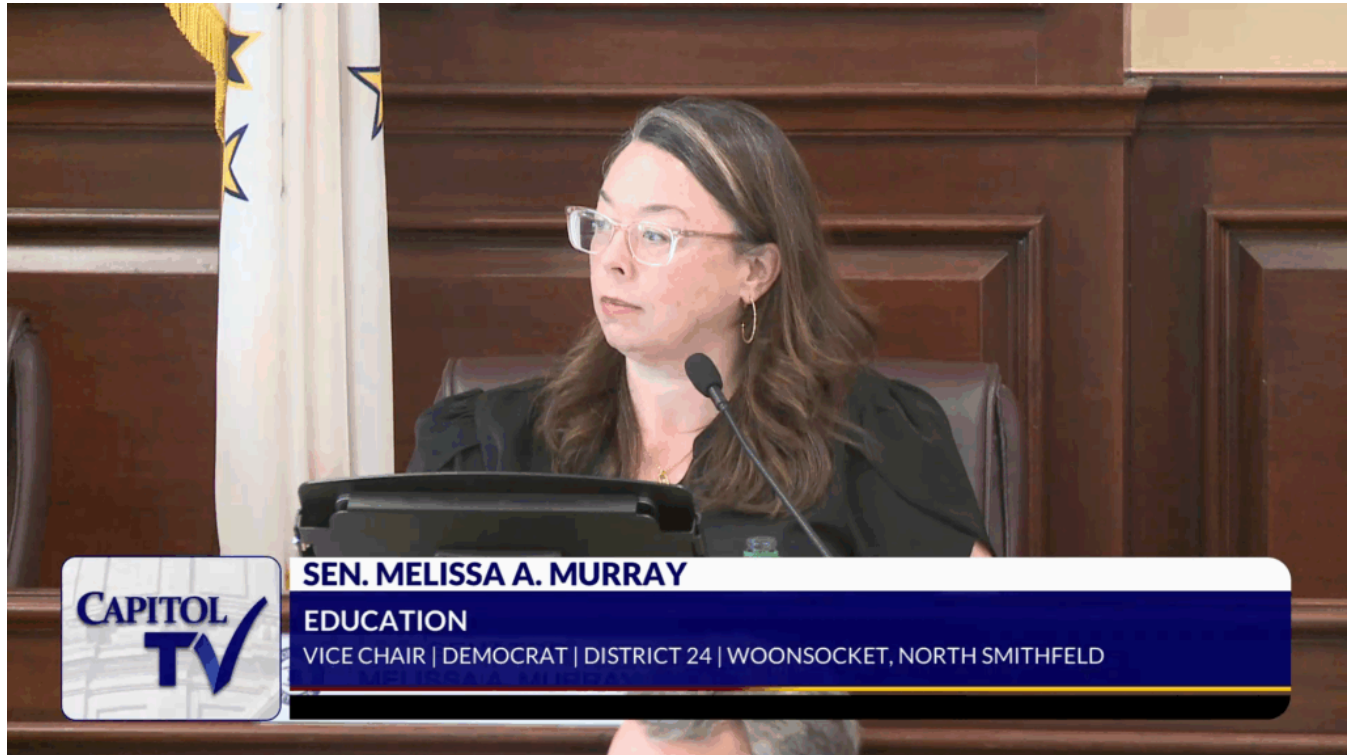
Amy Mullen
Vice President
NEA Rhode Island

Exhibit G

<https://perma.cc/7CGD-L8FK>

Senate panel advances charter school moratorium despite vocal opposition campaign

BY: ALEXANDER CASTRO - JUNE 3, 2026 5:45 AM



📷 Sen. Melissa Murray, a Woonsocket Democrat, is seen during Senate Committee on Education meeting on June 2, 2026. (Screencap/CapitolTV)

A \$72,000 ad campaign in favor of charter schools did not deter a Rhode Island Senate panel on Tuesday from advancing a proposed three-year moratorium on new and expanded charter schools in the Ocean State.

The Senate Committee on Education's 8-1 vote on the bill – [S2787](#), sponsored by Woonsocket Democratic Sen. Melissa Murray – sends the [freshly tweaked proposal](#) to the Senate floor. The lone no vote came from Sen. Thomas J. Paolino, a Lincoln Republican.

Committee chair and Cranston Democratic Sen. Hanna Gallo reminded the room at the beginning of Tuesday's speedy six-minute hearing that the five bills on the agenda were not up for vigorous debate.

“For those of you who are not aware, all of these bills have been heard, and so they’re for consideration today,” she said.

There had already been plentiful public comment on Murray's bill as well as its House companion [H7415](#) by Pawtucket Democratic Rep. Mary Messier during hearings on May 13

and March 10, respectively. The legislation would forbid the state's K-12 council from approving, preliminarily or finally, applications to create or expand district charter schools, independent charter schools and mayoral academies over the next three school years.

A revision of Murray's original bill was posted online Monday at 12:59 p.m. The only change made is a slight edit to the proposal's allowed number of charter schools. The statewide cap is currently 35 charter schools, and the original bill would have dropped that cap to 25. The amended bill would allow for up to 28 charters.

The bills have attracted a robust response from pro-charter groups in the state.

Mike Raia, president of Half Street Group, confirmed Tuesday that one of these groups, Stop the Wait RI, is running what he called a "comprehensive media campaign" opposing the legislation. Raia said the campaign totals approximately \$72,000 and includes radio ads on WPRO, Latina 100.3 and Poder 102.1, plus billboards and targeted digital ads.

Submissions to the Federal Communications Commission, which requires public filings of political ads on radio, TV, and satellite networks, show that Stop the Wait bought 210 radio spots on WPRO/WEAN for a gross total of \$23,205. The ads are scheduled to run through late June.

Collective Action for Education, another pro-charter organization, placed a 42-spot, \$4,990 radio order on WPRO/WEAN that ran from May 11 through May 24.

One of Stop the Wait's ads that ran recently on WPRO references an [April poll](#) commissioned by the Rhode Island League of Charter Public Schools, which found that 67% of 800 respondents said they support the expansion of charter public schools.

"Two out of three Rhode Islanders support an expansion of charter public schools," the ad said. "You can't get two out of three Rhode Islanders to agree on anything, but politicians and special interests on Smith Hill are supporting a bill that would permanently ban any new charter public school."

Stop the Wait intends to remain active through the Democratic primaries, Raia said. The League of Charter Public Schools poll found that 64% of likely Democratic primary voters hold the opinion of permitting more charter schools.

Gov. Dan McKee [previously told](#) press outlets in April that he would support the temporary moratorium bill, despite his long-running support for charter schools and mayoral academies. A spokesperson did not reply to a request for comment Tuesday.

Supporters' arguments for the legislation dominated the March 10 initial hearing of Messier's bill, which she [previously told](#) the Boston Globe she had submitted at the request of teachers'

unions. Bill backers argued that even a temporary pause would help Rhode Island reassess how it funds public education.

Currently, when a Rhode Island student enrolls in a charter school, the per-pupil allocations from both state and local sources “follow” that student, as the charter gets the monetary aid tied to the student. But local districts are also allowed “holdbacks” whereby they can reduce the local payment to account for costs – like maintenance, staffing or other fixed expenses – that they still carry even after a student leaves for a charter.

State law [allows](#) districts to reduce local payments by whichever is greater: 7% of the district’s local per-pupil funding, or a calculation tied to certain district costs. That reduction became capped at 14% per [recommendations](#) from the McKee administration that were finalized in the 2025 legislative session and ultimately took effect at the start of fiscal year 2026.



📷 A mural inside Segue Institute for Learning, an independent public charter school in Central Falls. (Photo by Alexander Castro/Rhode Island Current)

For public school district officials, these reductions still do not fully cover the fixed costs that remain when their students exit for charters, while charter proponents argue the funding is supposed to follow the student to the school they attend regardless of whether it’s a traditional public school or a public charter.

“The current funding structure can place significant and sometimes unpredictable pressure on municipal budgets and on traditional public school systems that support and continue to educate the vast majority, majority of our students,” said Nicole Renzulli, the director of

communications and governmental affairs for Cranston Mayor Ken Hopkins, at the March 10 hearing.

Murray, when introducing her bill before committee on May 13, echoed the sentiment: “What we’re looking to do here is to have a fair and equitable and fully-funded education, appropriately funded education, including and especially for our high needs students, many of whom are not in charter schools,” she said. “But we need to figure out that funding, and we need to make it work.”

Turning back the clock

Murray’s bill would not just disallow new charters, but possibly stop some already in process: It retained retroactive language that would stop the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education from OK’ing charters approved after July 1, 2025.

That led Sen. Sam Zurier, a Providence Democrat and cosponsor of the bill, to express concerns about the proposal despite his voting in the affirmative Tuesday. He would like to see the Senate consider a floor amendment before the bill passes – mainly to avoid derailing the opening of a school already approved.

“I do believe that we need to have a moratorium on charter school approvals,” Zurier said. “However, it happens that there’s one school that is partially through the approval process.”

The affected school would be De La Comunidad Bilingual School, which received initial approval from the K-12 council last year and expects to open in 2027 in Providence with about 628 students once fully enrolled, according to the school’s website.

Victor Capellan, the founder and CEO of the pro-charter Collective Action for Education who also serves as treasurer on De La Comunidad’s board, said the school would be the state’s only K-12 public outfit “built for bilingual children. This bill would shut it down before it even opens,” he said in an email Tuesday.

The school would serve students from Providence, Cranston and Pawtucket – something the latter two cities [moved to challenge](#) in court earlier this year, the Valley Breeze reported.

Cranston Superintendent of Schools Jeannine Nota-Masse testified on Messier’s version of the bill during its House committee introduction on March 10.

“I understand the concept of competition, but I also understand that the money we have to spend is being unfairly and unethically spent and spread to various entities,” Nota-Masse said during the hearing.

But letting De La Comunidad continue down the path to opening its doors, Zurier said on Tuesday, “would not cause irreparable damage to the general goal of this bill.”

It's not the only school that would be affected. The Greene School in West Greenwich, which [received approval](#) in November 2025 to expand to serve middle school students would also have its plans interrupted.

"If this bill passes, we will have to look RI middle grades students, families, and educators in the eye and tell them that we cannot open our doors to them – not because we failed, but because the legislature stopped us midstream," Kerry Tuttlebee, head of the school, said in an email Tuesday.

Capellan added that the moratorium bill constitutes "educational redlining" and "a deliberate, calculated effort to deny opportunity to the families who already have the least."

Lauren Matlach, deputy director of the Rhode Island League of Charter Public Schools, said in a separate statement Tuesday that the legislation is being "intentionally misrepresented."

"In actuality, the bill permanently reduces the number of charters allowed in our state," Matlach wrote.

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) is also not keen on the proposed moratorium.

In written testimony submitted to the Senate Education Committee on May 13, Steve Osborn, RIDE's student opportunity officer, wrote to ask the Senate panel and "respectfully urge[d]" them to oppose the bill, as it would "unnecessarily halt the replication" of what he described as proven charter models while also leaving the public school system unaffected.

In a separate testimony on Messier's bill, Osborn said families submitted 30,202 applications for 3,170 available charter seats for the 2025-26 school year – evidence, he argued, of a "multi-year trend of high oversubscription."

Senate President Valarie Lawson is also president of the National Education Association Rhode Island, one of the state's largest teacher's unions.

Greg Paré, a Senate spokesperson, said before Tuesday's vote that while he hadn't "caught up with the Senate President yet about this," he anticipated the chamber would support the bill if the committee recommended passage.

Murray's bill was not yet scheduled for a floor vote as of Tuesday night, but Paré said the vote could be added to Thursday's floor calendar.

Larry Berman, a House spokesperson, said the House is still considering Messier's version of the bill, which has not moved since its committee hearing on March 10, when it consumed a massive chunk of the public comment portion of the five-and-a-half hour committee meeting.

Each chamber would need to pass the other's duplicate bill before it can reach Gov. Dan McKee's desk. The legislative session is expected to end on June 12.

Reporter Christopher Shea contributed to this story.

Exhibit H

<https://perma.cc/3ESP-QTW9>



Senate Committee on Labor & Gaming: 5-13-2026



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Exhibit I

<https://perma.cc/PPU8-M2WP>



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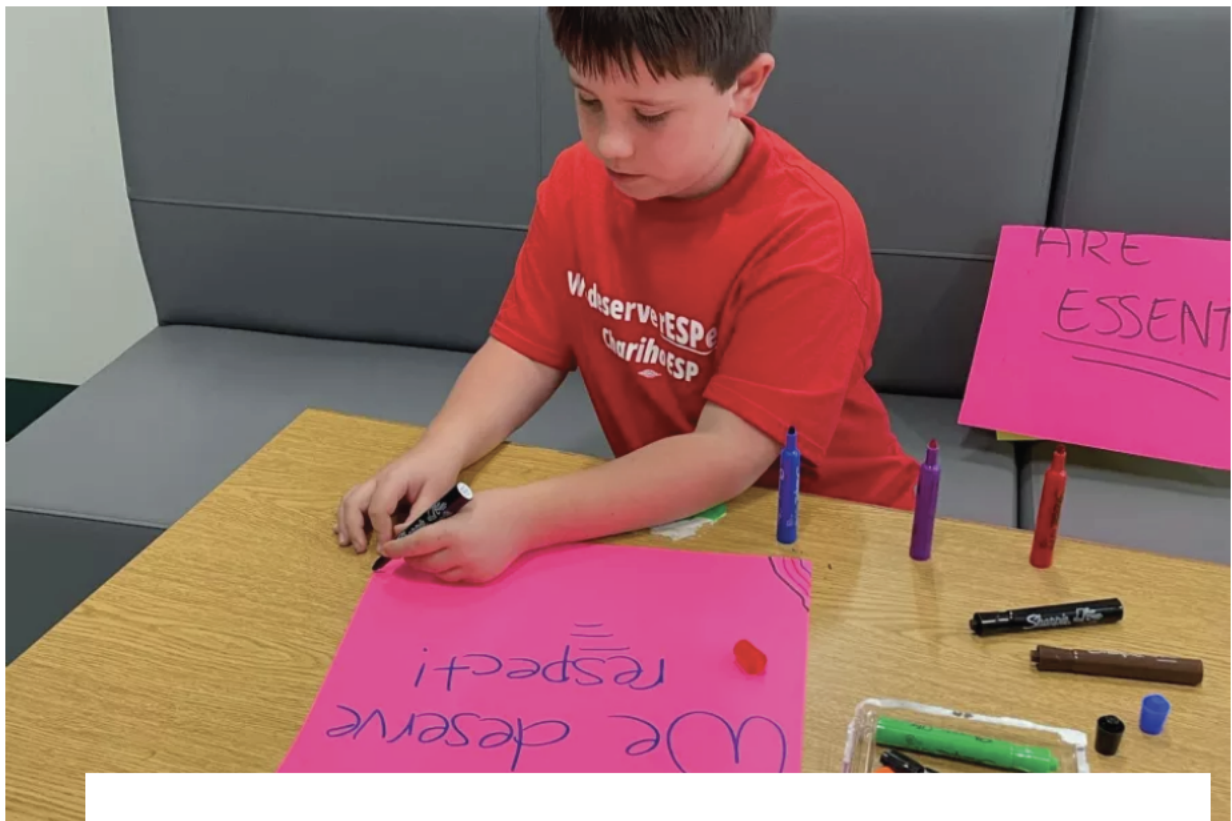
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—Mary K. Barden, Executive Director

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More than 383,000 students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine.

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Let's BRING REAL CHANGE



"We've marched for our lives, we've testified and worn orange against gun violence . . . Here in Rhode Island, we don't want to wait until we add to the statistics to make a change, but it requires political will."

— Jen Saarinen, Math Teacher



SPEAK OUT TO DEMAND CHANGE

1 in 6 children lacks consistent access to the food needed for fueling their bodies and minds.

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In 2022, more than half (59%) of Rhode Island children ages 3 to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care.

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Diversity & Inclusion

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Gun Violence

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