



## Rhode Island League of Charter Schools

April 11, 2022

Honorable Joseph M. McNamara  
Chairman, Health, Education & Welfare Committee  
Rhode Island House of Representatives  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

### **Re: H 7117 – Opposed**

Dear Chairman McNamara,

I write on behalf of the Rhode Island League of Charter Schools to express our opposition to H 7117. Our member charter schools fully support the expansion of public school opportunity for all Rhode Island families. However, we believe that objective would best be achieved by offering Rhode Island's families more public school options and more information about those options. As written, H 7117 would accomplish neither. Instead, it would undermine the Rhode Island Department of Education's ("RIDE") new and highly successful "EnrollRI" charter school common application platform, create additional administrative burdens for school districts, RIDE, and charter public schools alike, and further disenfranchise already disadvantaged students and families for whom charter schools are an intentional option.

In 2020, RIDE launched the EnrollRI common application platform to make it easier for Rhode Island families to apply to any charter school that their children are eligible to attend. Since the launch of EnrollRI, Rhode Island's charter school enrollment applications have expanded exponentially. This current school-year, there are over seventeen thousand students on Rhode Island charter school waiting lists. According to RIDE, early indications show that 2022-23 EnrollRI applications will, once again, increase to records numbers. Respectfully, H 7117 is a solution in search of a problem. There has been an average of 9.5 applications for every available seat at Rhode Island's charter schools over the past two years, yet in response H 7117 seeks to increase lottery pools rather than expand seat opportunity.

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RIDE's demographic data has long shown that Rhode Island charter schools enroll very diverse student populations. Indeed, RIDE's charter school regulations encourage charter schools to design their outreach and recruitment strategies to attract higher percentages of disadvantaged and at-risk student populations. Our member charter schools do just that and H 7117 would undermine those efforts. For example, if a highly diverse statewide charter school like Highlander Charter School were forced to include every K-12 school-aged student in the state in its lottery, the result would be a lottery pool of over 10,000 statewide applicants for just 30 kindergarten seats. A statewide applicant pool would significantly impact the odds of its targeted population of disadvantaged, urban core students from being drawn through the lottery. To achieve this result, every district from Block Island to Burrillville would have to collect and send their student data to RIDE. RIDE would need to review and verify that student data before conducting annual lotteries for every charter school. Charter schools would then have to attempt to reach families – many of whom would likely have no idea that their children had even been entered into a charter school lottery – and work their way through extensive wait lists to finalize their school rosters, leaving both districts and charters in a protracted state of uncertainty. This is entirely unnecessary.

As proposed, H 7117 would also negatively impact school options for economically disadvantaged families who experience frequent mobility due to housing instability. For example, a kindergarten student who's family lives in Pawtucket but later moves to Providence after February 1<sup>st</sup> would be excluded from the Paul Cuffee School, Southside Elementary, or Times<sup>2</sup> Academy lotteries, unless his/her parent(s) had the foresight to send RIDE "an acknowledgment that they intend to be registered in [Providence] at the commencement of the school year" or "provide the student's data to the department of education by February 1". This potential impact of H 7117 on already disadvantaged families is problematic.

If the intent of H 7117 is to ensure that all eligible public school students are provided the opportunity to participate in a charter school lottery, then the bill is patently unnecessary. All eligible public school students *already* have that opportunity. What they do not have are sufficient opportunities to actually *attend* the public charter schools of their choice. H-7117 does nothing to expand charter school opportunity. It only serves to expand charter school waiting lists.

Very truly yours,



Keith Oliveira,

Executive Director

Rhode Island League of Charter Schools