



**Mary Townsend, Executive Vice President, RI Council 94 AFSCME
& President, Wise Local 357, AFSCME
H-5252 Con, Testimony
February 6, 2025**

As I am unable to attend today's hearing, I have asked my Council 94 friends to read this statement. For the record, my name is Mary Townsend. I am Council 94's Executive Vice President and President of WISE Local 357, the support staff of Warwick Public Schools. First and foremost, I'm a Special Education Teacher Assistant in our District for 43 years.

There are approximately 400 WISE Members with the majority of us being taxpayers and voters in Warwick and we want you to know who we are... WISE Members are the foundation and backbone of Warwick Public Schools. We are the Custodial staff that opens every school and building each and every day to prepare and provide a safe, clean, healthy learning environment for all students and staff. We are the Maintenance employees, including our Grounds Crew and Trades, that work diligently each and every day to maintain and repair our HVAC systems, our plumbing, our electrical needs, our grounds and fields in each of our schools and buildings. Custodial and Maintenance always prepared for the Winter needs of clearing the snow, shoveling and plowing, and sanding for safe entry and the Summer Cleaning of every school! We are the Clerical staff in every school and at Administration that perform the daily responsibilities of assisting students and staff with the valuable positions they hold often behind the scenes. We are the I.T. Department supporting Technology in every school and building, repairing, maintaining and upgrading all technology devices, network equipment, hardware problems, software operating systems, etc. needed for students to learn and Teachers to teach. We are the Teacher Assistants throughout this District in Kindergartens and Special Education Programs supporting students from the young age of three right into adulthood.

Providing the opportunities for all students to learn in the Least Restrictive Environment alongside our Teachers who rely on us to implement the strategies and instruction they provide. In summary, we are WISE!

From my heart, everything we do is for our students! I would add that everyone here in Warwick Public Schools, including our School Committee, always puts our students first and continues to do so. A brief example, when positions that were funded by ESSER funds were eliminated by other districts, we continued to keep our Teachers and staff. Warwick Student scores continued to rise with this support as proven in the monthly reports of our Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and MTSS as reported at School Committee meetings. There are so many more examples of our dedication to our students, but I couldn't possibly list the all in one statement. I would be remiss if I didn't point out that during this time of challenges for our students, Warwick has provided not only support but opportunities for all students of all abilities!

I raise this point because we are opposed to this Budget Commission resolution! This resolution is looking more like a "power grab" by Mayor Picozzi and the City of Warwick than a solution that will benefit this city and most importantly our students! Respectfully, I must say that this budget commission is premature and unnecessary. Additionally, the City of Warwick should take a hard look in the mirror. In the FY 2023 Audit, the City also ran at a deficit. Did the City take corrective action? Yes they did. I am disappointed and angry that Warwick Public Schools were not given the opportunity to do the same.

While I am hearing "Your members are protected." I'm still concerned that a Budget Commission will make WISE the cuts of first resort, eliminate our positions and/or departments up to and possibly privatization! Will they care the way we do about our students?

I have shared 43 years of my life working with students of all ages and all abilities! I see and hear all the great things that are happening everyday in our Warwick schools! It's ironic that the people who will make this decision for our students have probably never stepped foot inside our schools!

I implore you on behalf of Warwick Public Schools' students to oppose this Bill! Please allow the School Committee and Administration the time to close the budget deficit without the creation of a budget commission, taking note of the most recent and updated information regarding our Administration and School Committee's Work to move forward with their plans. There is only one final question, why are we not following our own RI General Laws already in place regarding RI School Districts?

Sincerely and respectfully,

Mary Townsend