

## Lisa Cataldi

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**From:** Rep. McNamara, Joseph M.  
**Sent:** Monday, February 10, 2025 12:46 PM  
**To:** House Education Committee  
**Subject:** FW: Opposition to HB 5252 – Protecting the Integrity of Warwick’s School Budget Process

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**From:** DesRoches, Stephanie L.,DNP <slidesroches@bwh.harvard.edu>  
**Sent:** Friday, February 7, 2025 9:48 AM  
**To:** Rep. McNamara, Joseph M. <Rep-McNamara@rilegislature.gov>  
**Subject:** Opposition to HB 5252 – Protecting the Integrity of Warwick’s School Budget Process

Dear Rep. Joseph McNamara

As a Warwick resident and a parent of two children in Warwick Public Schools, I am writing to strongly oppose HB 5252. This bill proposes the creation of a Budget Commission—composed primarily of mayoral appointees subject to City Council approval—that would temporarily strip significant budgetary authority from the elected School Committee. As both a taxpayer and an advocate for my children’s education, I find this measure deeply concerning.

This legislation, introduced following an 8-1 vote by the Warwick City Council, seeks to transfer core financial powers from the democratically elected School Committee and Superintendent to a politically appointed commission. Such a move undermines the foundational principles of balanced government and public accountability. I urge you to consider the following key reasons why HB 5252 is the wrong approach:

### **1) Undermining Democratic Governance**

The School Committee members were elected by Warwick voters and are directly accountable to the public. Stripping them of their budgetary authority and shifting it to a commission dominated by mayoral appointees violates the intent of the Warwick City Charter. Any significant restructuring of power should be approached with extreme caution and should only occur under the most extraordinary circumstances. While the projected deficit is a serious issue, it does not justify dismantling the existing governance structure in this way.

### **2) Setting a Dangerous Precedent**

Approving this commission would create a troubling precedent for other Rhode Island municipalities, encouraging local officials to bypass elected bodies by consolidating power within politically appointed commissions. If financial oversight measures are necessary, they should come from the state level rather than from local elected officials seizing authority from their counterparts. This bill could create a political incentive for similar power grabs in the future, eroding the essential checks and balances that protect local governance.

### **3) More Effective and Collaborative Alternatives Exist**

The School Committee has demonstrated its willingness to collaborate with the City on budgetary challenges, including hiring external advisors and implementing cost-cutting measures. If additional oversight is needed, a more appropriate approach would be to establish an independent financial expert to advise both the School Committee and City Council—rather than creating an unnecessary bureaucratic layer with political appointees. A commission without broader financial expertise would likely add inefficiency and delay meaningful solutions rather than improving fiscal management.

### **4) The Existing Legal Framework Provides a Better Path**

Current laws and financial oversight mechanisms already allow for state intervention if necessary. If Warwick's fiscal situation reaches a point requiring state-level involvement, the proper channels already exist to address the issue. There is no justification for singling Warwick out with an unprecedented, locally-driven restructuring of governance that lacks broad community support.

### **A Smarter, Long-Term Solution**

If changes to Warwick's governance structure are needed, they should be pursued through a deliberate and transparent process, with voter approval, rather than through a hastily implemented, temporary measure. Instead of passing HB 5252, efforts should focus on improving communication and financial management within the existing framework, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are handled responsibly while maintaining democratic accountability.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to reject HB 5252 or, at the very least, delay its advancement to allow Warwick's elected officials the opportunity to resolve budgetary concerns through existing oversight mechanisms.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to responsible governance and public accountability.

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