



**WARWICK  
TEACHERS  
UNION, AFT**  
RIFT, AFL • CIO

**Darlene Netcoh**  
PRESIDENT

February 7, 2025

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Representatives:

As president of the Warwick Teachers' Union, I am writing to ask you to oppose House Bill H-5252. The Warwick Teachers' Union is opposed to this bill because it is unnecessary, ill-conceived, and a blatant attempt for the mayor of Warwick to seize control of the schools and ignore the will of the Warwick citizens who elected the five members of the Warwick School Committee to oversee the Warwick Public Schools.

There is no need to pass new legislation to create a "Warwick Public Schools Budget Commission" because a law to address alleged city and school department budget deficits already exists. As part of this law, the city or school committee must meet with the Auditor General. The Warwick Public Schools (WPS) administration and the Warwick School Committee (WSC) met with the Auditor General on January 13, 2025 and showed him their plan for addressing the potential deficit. At their meeting on January 14, 2025 the WSC made almost \$3 million in cuts to the budget, as they had conveyed they would to the Auditor General. On January 30, 2025, the WSC made additional budget cuts. The WSC has another meeting with the Auditor General scheduled for February 13, 2025. Additionally, the WPS and WSC have already hired an outside auditor to assist them in their efforts to balance the school department's budget. Both the WSC and WPS administration are following the procedures that current statutes dictate; therefore, there is no need to enact another law, this one aimed directly at Warwick.

In addition to being unnecessary, this bill is ill-conceived because there are unintended consequences of its passage. Once the Rhode Island General Assembly enacts this legislation, the floodgates will be open for mayors in other cities and towns to create their own commissions to seize control of the schools. There are reasons too myriad to enumerate as to why there currently exists a separation between the schools and the municipality, in those municipalities in which elected school committees exist. However, the fact remains that this separation exists. The General Assembly should not ignore the charters of Rhode Island cities and towns and, therefore, should not pass House Bill 5252.

As I previously mentioned, Warwick voters elected five Warwick residents to be members of the school committee and oversee the running of the school department. The creation of a Warwick

Public Schools Budget Commission is in direct opposition to the will of the citizens of Warwick. The members of the WSC have the legal right to make decisions for the schools. The mayor does not currently have the right, and the Rhode Island General Assembly should not give him that right. Because the budget commission would have five members, of which three the mayor would appoint, he will have control over the schools. Furthermore, these individuals may not even be Warwick residents and will have no knowledge, including institutional, of the needs of the Warwick Public Schools. By a stroke of a pen, mayors should not have the right to usurp the governing powers of other duly elected officials. We need to maintain a system of checks and balances in Warwick and do not need a mayor dictating to the schools.

Finally, as a lifelong Warwick resident, a graduate of Warwick Public Schools, a teacher of thirty-five years in the Warwick Public Schools, and a Warwick voter, I can attest that this current school committee and administration have been working diligently to properly run the schools and address this current budget situation. They also have a good working relationship with the City, so I have no idea why the mayor would want to create this commission, other than to seize total control of the schools and impose his will upon them. As an aside, if the General Assembly would like to pass legislation that would help cities and towns and school departments balance their budgets, then it should look into passing legislation to curb the unfunded mandates that the Rhode Island Department of Education inflicts upon the schools.

I oppose the creation of a "Warwick Schools Budget Commission," and I respectfully request that you vote against House Bill 5252. Please do not disenfranchise Warwick voters. Thank you for your time and your attention.

Sincerely,



Darlene Netcoh  
President