



To: House Committee on Education
From: Mary Barden, Executive Director, National Education Association Rhode Island
Date: February 25, 2025
Re: H5165 – AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAMS

Dear Chairman McNamara and Members of the Education Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the National Education Association Rhode Island and our 12,000 members to express our strong support for H5165, introduced by Representative Cotter, for several reasons.

This year, student health and wellbeing is a top priority of NEARI's legislative agenda. We are working with parents, allies, and lawmakers to tackle the root causes that hinder learning, engagement, and meaningful social interactions in safe, welcoming public schools.

As you all know there is a student behavioral and mental health crisis, and it is having a significant impact on education in our K-12 schools.

Here are just a few statistics where a majority of our preK-12 educators report the following:

- 74% -- see an increase in students acting out
- 74% -- say students are having trouble concentrating
- 63% -- see an increase in absenteeism

In fact, classroom teachers report losing a median of five hours of instruction time each month due to disruptive student behavior. This is a very clear problem.

When we polled our members on these issues, they overwhelmingly said they want clearer district policies, more resources, more support from administration, and a voice at the table when creating district policies. Our teachers and support staff have very real issues with morale due to student behavioral and mental health issues which discourage people from wanting to enter the profession.

We need to work toward meaningful solutions that are built from collaboration with classroom teachers, support staff, school administrators, and school social workers and mental health professionals. We need to create policies that are consistent across our districts. This bill would create a district wide student safety and behavioral health committee comprised of these individuals, whose sole focus would be to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for student behavioral and mental health.

For these reasons, I encourage you to pass H 5165.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mary Barden, Executive Director, NEARI