

Tuesday April 1st, 2025
House Committee on Education
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Dear House Committee on Education,

My name is Gabriella Bautista Bolvito and I am a senior at Classical High School. I am writing to inform the committee that as the 2024-2025 Chair of the RIDE Student Advisory Council and a non-voting ex-officio member on both the Board of Education and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, **I oppose the provision of House Bill 5839 that would make the chairperson of the RIDE Student Advisory Council a voting member on the board and council previously mentioned.**

At one of the first meetings I attended, the council was reviewing the FY 2026 Capital and Operating Budget and finally approved it to be sent to the Rhode Island State Budget Office. I knew little of what a budget entailed but was happy to be present in the conversation and to have the opportunity to give my input when necessary. As a 17-year-old with only an intro level Macroeconomics course in my back pocket, the prospect of potentially having to vote on a matter as serious as RIDE's budget is daunting. Although I hold several leadership positions, RIDE's area of focus is still foreign to me.

I do not believe that a 15-year-old (Chairpersons can potentially be in their sophomore year) or even an 18-year-old has the knowledge or expertise that other individuals on the council and board have to make million dollar decisions or decisions that could impact the education of thousands across the state. My role as a student representative is to try to bring a student perspective to the council and board and have my input affect the decisions that members later take.

Many individuals on the council have been students, teachers, administrators, and other actors in education. I respect the time that they have dedicated to learning and teaching and see their efforts as valuable. Although I am a supporter of having students at the forefront of their education, I do not believe that it is right to expect a teenager to be able to make calculated and wise decisions on policies that are new to them and that they barely understand. Rather, I see the student representative positions as an opportunity for them to grow in knowledge, report back to their peers, and provide input from a student perspective.

I would be happy to have a conversation with the sponsors of the bill if they are interested and urge you all to carefully consider the voting status of individuals who serve on bodies that affect the lives of thousands of Rhode Island kids and adolescents.

Thank you,
Gabriella Bautista Bolvito
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