



Mayor of Providence

Brett P. Smiley

April 9th, 2024

The Honorable Marvin Abney
House Finance Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith St
Providence RI, 02903

Dear Chairman Abney and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I write this letter in support of House Bill 8050, which will authorize the City of Providence to issue \$400 million in bonds to rehabilitate our schools at Providence Public Schools (PPSD).

Safe, modern, and sustainable school buildings are foundational to high-quality education. PPSD has set the goal of having 100 percent of our students in new or new-like buildings by 2030 and House Bill 8050 is an essential step to secure funds to continue work towards this important goal for children, families, and communities in Providence.

Many PPSD school buildings and facilities are dated and in poor condition. Most importantly, these facilities do not facilitate 21st century learning. For example, Roger Williams Middle School in the Lower South Providence neighborhood has new laptop carts but does not have an elevator to transport these laptop carts across a four-story building. House Bill 8050 will allow PPSD to continue work on our Capital Plan priorities to ensure that all our school facilities are up to baseline standards for 21st century learning, addressing structural issues that have been noted at our schools for years and bringing modern security and educational technology to our schools. This will ensure that our schools – and in turn, our students and teachers – are safer and healthier. These investments will also help increase student attendance at PPSD and will show our students and families that they are valued and deserve high-quality, 21st century learning facilities.

This bill will provide funds to implement the next phase of the PPSD Capital Plan that aims to build or renovate schools in communities where Providence families live. Upon completion of this work in 2029, PPSD will have 28 school buildings and an Early Childhood Center for high-quality early childhood instruction and family-friendly diagnostic screening at Leviton Annex Elementary School in the West End. For example, Robert F. Kennedy Elementary School in the Elmhurst neighborhood presently serves 800 students will serve up to 1000 students once it has been renovated. Mary E. Fogarty Elementary School in the Lower South Providence

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neighborhood presently only serves one neighborhood and will serve families from across many Providence neighborhoods after construction. With these investments, students may learn with the same school community from Pre-K through eighth grade, continuing friendships they first fostered in Pre-K or Kindergarten. New and renovated school buildings will have at least three classrooms per grade in elementary school and four classrooms per grade in middle school. These requirements will ensure that all students may be engaged learners, participating in class and asking questions, and receive the support and attention they need from teachers and classroom support staff. With these investments, PPSD will also have the capacity for 2,000 additional students in case enrollment increases.

Since school bonds require approval from voters, House Bill 8050 will allow the City of Providence to seek approval for this bond on the November 2024 election ballot. The changes outlined in this bill will provide us with ample time to commence the next phase of school construction projects by December 30, 2024, if the ballot measure is approved.

I commend Representative Biah for his commitment to ensuring that all students in Providence have safe, modern, and sustainable 21st learning facilities, and respectfully ask the committee to vote in favor of this legislation.

Sincerely,


Mayor Brett P. Smiley
City of Providence