

ANGÉLICA INFANTE-GREEN  
*Commissioner*



Providence Public School District  
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JAVIER MONTAÑEZ  
*Superintendent*

April 23, 2024

Rep. Marvin Abney  
Chair, Rhode Island House Committee on Finance  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Re: House Bill 7402

Dear Chair Abney,

I am submitting this letter to record my strong opposition to House Bill 7402, which would amend R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-5-30 by eliminating the Rhode Island Commissioner of Education's authority to withhold non-education state aid from a municipality for its violation of law or regulations during the time the municipality has a school or school district under state intervention pursuant to the Crowley Act. If enacted, the Bill would be retroactive to January, 2021 but would immediately deprive our students, parents and teachers of critical resources.

The Providence Public School District would be harmed by this bill that would enable a municipality with a school or school district under state intervention pursuant to the Crowley Act to simply disregard all legal maintenance of effort funding mandates without immediate consequence, leaving an under-funded school district and Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) with few viable remedies.

Presumably, any school or district under state intervention has experienced, or is experiencing, systemic difficulties, some of which are likely the result of fiscal mismanagement and/or a failure to comply with applicable law or regulations. The Crowley Act has established the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and RIDE's Commissioner, the Council's chief executive officer, see R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-6, as the agents assigned to remedy such systemic difficulties. Depriving the Commissioner of one of the few explicitly-described tools provided under the Act to accomplish this task would only hinder, rather than advance, the purpose of the Act.

Finally, it should be noted that if enacted retroactively, House Bill 7402 would require that the Providence Public School District return \$11,074,378 to the City of Providence for funds previously withheld by the Commissioner pursuant to § 16-5-30. This would result in irreparable harm to the students, employees, facilities, and community served by the District, as well as to the quality of life in the City.

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Together we have made progress in addressing the generational failures of the Providence School system. We have built new or "like-new" buildings and modernized the skillsets of our teacher workforce. We have seen student growth, particularly in our students who have tested out of MLL services. This bill would effectively halt our progress. We need to work together at the city and state levels to fully fund our schools and to create better outcomes for our learners.

Respectfully submitted,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Javier Montanez", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Javier Montanez, Superintendent