



April 3, 2025

Re: Testimony in Opposition to H5389

Honorable Members of the Committee:

We write to you as a group of grassroots organizations and allies focused entirely on the well-being and advancement of public school students and families. We oppose this legislation because it fails to protect and, in fact, removes protections for adequate education funding for students in school districts that may now or in the future be subjected to a state takeover with the goal of improving the schools.

The existing statute requires that local communities maintain their commitment to funding public education during a state takeover and increase annual school funding in the same proportion as the increase to education funding statewide. This is a crucial policy protection to eliminate the risk that the local community disinvests in their schools and stops providing adequate and equitable funding increases during a state takeover, a known negative side effect in state takeovers historically, and as seen right here in Rhode Island over the past several years. Regardless of who is running the schools at any time, whether the state or the local community, students need adequately funded schools and high-quality public education. This amendment would shift away from adequate education funding, linked to the education funding increases statewide, and instead limit local school funding obligations to a portion of tax increases. Education funding should be linked to education adequacy and equity, NOT to restraining tax increases.

Adequate taxation to meet community needs requires the balancing of municipal priorities. Tax increases impact low-income families in the public schools disproportionately. However, that is

not a justification for permitting already vulnerable funding for public schools in districts taken over by the state to fall further behind better-funded communities during a state takeover.

Please reject this removal of critical protection for adequate and equitable local funding to public education during a state takeover. Please continue to require local communities to provide increasing support for public education during a state takeover. The recent experience in Providence underscores how important it is to require that municipalities maintain and increase their local commitment to funding the public schools during a state takeover.

Furthermore, it is imperative to consider the national context in which this legislation emerges. At a time when there is an unprecedented dismantling of the Department of Education, the implications of reducing school district accountability become even more alarming. This bill, which proposes to limit local school funding obligations and, consequently, may reduce the accountability of school districts, is particularly concerning. As educational services such as English Language Learners (ELL), Multilingual Learners (MLL), and special needs education face potential risks of diminished support, the need for enhanced accountability is crucial. We urge the Committee to recognize the broader national emergency in educational governance and maintain the mechanisms for ensuring that vital educational services are not just preserved but strengthened. The stability and quality of our public education system rely on such accountability, especially during these critical times of organizational and administrative upheaval.

Thank you for rejecting this bill and continuing to provide crucial protection for adequate and equitable local school funding for families in the public schools during a state takeover.

Respectfully submitted,

Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE)
Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE)
Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)
Providence Student Union (PSU)
The Center for Justice (CFJ)
Youth in Action (YIA)
Young Voices (YV)