



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
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April 3, 2025

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, Rhode Island House Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Strong Opposition, House Bill 5389 (2025)

Dear Chair Abney:

In my capacity as the Chair of the Rhode Island Board of Education (“the Board”), I write to you today to **in strong opposition to House Bill 5389**.

Deeply troubling, H5389 would amend R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-5-30 by eliminating the Commissioner of Education’s authority to withhold non-education state aid from a municipality for its violation of educational law or regulations during the time the municipality has a school or school district under state intervention pursuant to the Crowley Act. Further still, H5389 seeks to amend the Crowley Act by altering the formula used to calculate the minimum fiscal support provided to a city or town when a school in its local education agency, or local education agency as a whole, is placed under state intervention and control. Finally, and perhaps most troubling, H5389 seeks to install a fiscal overseer from the Department of Revenue—a sister state agency—thereby adding additional layers of bureaucratic command and control that the very origin of this intervention intentionally sought to remove and strip away so that educational professionals could do the requisite and long-necessary work to improve the system.

For far too long, our state has looked northward to our neighbor for solutions; but unlike Rhode Island, Massachusetts recognizes the extreme difficulty in effectuating long-needed systemic change in districts under intervention, and has explicitly granted those charged with the task much greater authority. In fact, the Commissioner of Massachusetts and many other New England states possess the very withholding power this bill seeks to strip from our Commissioner. In many cases, this is the only

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enforcement power the Commissioner possesses in order to bring municipalities into compliance, or further still, in order to bring districts into compliance with students IEPs, or with other statutorily mandated services.

For these forgoing reasons, **I again stand in strong opposition to H5389**. Respectfully, I believe there is no need for any of the three distinct statutory changes contemplated this bill at this time. Diverse stakeholders from labor, to parents and community members, to the state superintendents association have all offered opposition to this legislation. I hope the General Assembly will hear this loud and clear refrain.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Grey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Grey
Chair, RI Board of Education

cc: Honorable Members of Rhode Island House Committee on Finance
Nicole McCarthy, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of Policy to the Speaker of the House
Sharon Reynolds Ferland, House Fiscal Advisor
Christopher O'Brien, Committee Clerk
Patricia DiCenso, Chair, RI Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
Krystafer Redden, Chief of Staff at the Rhode Island Department of Education
Andy Andrade, Special Assistant for Legislative Affairs