



Parents Leading for Educational Equity  
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**To:** Rhode Island House Finance Committee

**From:** Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)

**RE: H - 5389 -- THE PAUL W. CROWLEY RHODE ISLAND STUDENT INVESTMENT INITIATIVE.**

Chairperson Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

On behalf of **Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)** and the families we represent, we submit this testimony in **strong opposition to H5389**. PLEE is a parent-led grassroots organization committed to advocating for policies that create an equitable educational landscape for all children. We work directly with families to address systemic barriers in education and early childhood services.

H5389 proposes changes that would significantly undermine the state's ability to ensure equitable funding and oversight for struggling schools. Specifically, the removal of the commissioner of elementary and secondary education's authority to withhold funds from noncompliant school districts weakens accountability measures intended to guarantee that funding is used effectively to improve student outcomes. Moreover, capping school district contributions to a mere twenty percent (20%) of any municipal tax levy increase fails to account for the growing and urgent needs of our most vulnerable students.

As an organization that works closely with families in underfunded districts, we have seen firsthand the consequences of systemic disinvestment in our schools. When intervention measures lack adequate funding and oversight, the burden falls on students who are already at a disadvantage. Without strong financial accountability measures, struggling districts may continue to mismanage resources, leaving students without critical support such as bilingual education, mental health services, and specialized instruction for students with disabilities.

Parents and caregivers have been told time and again to be patient, that change takes time. And while we understand that meaningful transformation doesn't happen overnight, H5389 threatens to move us further away from equity, not closer. This bill would undermine the very safeguards that families and advocates have fought for over decades. By weakening state oversight and capping local contributions, it disregards the long history of educational disinvestment and the ongoing realities our communities face. It sends a troubling message, that the futures of our children are up for negotiation. We refuse to accept that.

Further, the fiscal oversight provisions outlined in H5389 raise serious concerns about transparency and efficacy. The appointment of a fiscal overseer with broad authority over financial services, contracts, and expenditures does not inherently ensure that resources will be allocated equitably. In fact, without proper mechanisms to prioritize student-centered funding decisions, this provision could lead to cost-cutting measures that disproportionately impact the very students that state intervention is meant to help.

We urge the committee to reject H5389 and instead focus on strengthening funding mechanisms that prioritize educational equity. Any legislative action should aim to increase, rather than limit, the state's ability to support and intervene in districts that require additional

resources to meet their students' needs. Rhode Island's education system must remain accountable to the families it serves, ensuring that every student, regardless of zip code, has access to a high-quality education.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome the opportunity to further discuss how we can work together to ensure an equitable and effective education system for all Rhode Island students.

Sincerely,

**Parents Leading for Educational Equity**