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Commissioner



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DR. JAVIER MONTAÑEZ
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By email

HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chair, Rhode Island House Committee on Finance Rhode Island State
House, Room 306
Providence, RI 02903

In Re: House Bill No. 5389.

Dear Chairman Abney:

I am writing to express concern and to state my opposition to the above-cited legislation. If passed, this legislation would remove an important enforcement mechanism that ensures persistently low achieving schools and districts receive appropriate local funding to support the interventions necessary to close the achievement gap. Specifically, I am referring to H.5389's prohibition on the Commissioner's use of § 16-5-30 to order the General Treasurer to deduct funds owed to a municipality for a "violation or neglect of law". See *R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-60-6(9)(vii)*.

As I am sure you are aware, this legislation follows years of litigation regarding the City of Providence's obligation to increase funding to Providence Public Schools in accordance with its funding obligation under the Crowley Act. Without this legal obligation and enforcement mechanism the costs of closing this achievement gap were and would have continued to be borne *exclusively* by increased state funding attributed to the taxation of all Rhode Islanders and municipalities.

When viewed against other local communities, Providence has the third lowest local contribution to education among urban districts. In FY23, only Pawtucket and Woonsocket contributed less funding per pupil than Providence, home of the largest state school district. It is no surprise that it is these three communities who have the highest concentration of persistently low achieving schools. While the legislation attempts to address the municipal financial obligation by requiring districts and schools in intervention receive additional local funding equivalent to "twenty percent (20%) of the increase of taxes issued by the municipality", the service needs of our students are not going away and should not be beholden to political sentiment concerning tax increases.

In conclusion, without this bill our school district would be in danger of not receiving adequate funding and our students would be in danger of not experiencing the world-class education they rightfully deserve.

Sincerely,

Javier Montañez
Superintendent