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Commissioner Angelica Infante-Green &
Members of the RI Board of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Infante-Green and Members of the Rhode Island Board of Education:

I am writing to formally object to the application of RISE Prep Mayoral Academy to convert into an independent charter school. The academy claims that the "claw back" provision in the local tuition payment formula imposes an insurmountable financial burden. To that, as a former member of both the Woonsocket School Committee and City Council—and a plaintiff in lawsuits against the state over education funding—I say: *Welcome to the club!* Urban school districts have struggled under this flawed formula since its inception.

RISE Prep's proposal would add over \$500,000 to the Woonsocket Education Department's already strained budget. While this amount challenges the finances of the mayoral academy, it cripples the resources of a school department serving 5,500 students.

Even Jason Becker, one of the original contributors to the formula, later highlighted its deficiencies, particularly its disproportionate impact on urban districts. For example, the fixed teacher pension contribution burdens all communities equally, ignoring disparities in their ability to pay. Aligning this obligation with the funding formula could release over \$4.5 million annually for critical services currently denied to the neediest student populations. He pointed to others as mentioned in this 2013 Valley Breeze article.

(https://www.valleybreeze.com/news/funding-formula-tweaks-could-bring-millions-of-dollars-to-woonsocket/article_b11680bb-2f66-565e-885f-c3c833d4eeea.html)

Moreover, factors like inadequate funding for Multi-Language Learners (still categorized as "categorical aid") exacerbate inequities, depriving urban districts of essential resources. A 2023 Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) report reinforces how the current funding formula systematically disadvantages urban students in favor of non-urban districts.

(<https://ripec.org/fy-2024-state-education-aid/>)

The mayoral academy primarily serves families that prioritize education, which inherently reduces the need for costly support services like reading specialists, psychological services, and social workers. In contrast, the Woonsocket Education Department educates a more concentrated population of underserved students who require significantly more support. Allowing this conversion would redirect resources away from these students—those most in need—to disproportionately benefit fewer than 500 students at RISE Prep.

Regarding claims that Woonsocket doesn't contribute enough locally to education: in 2019, Woonsocket, along with Providence, West Warwick, and Pawtucket, paid the highest local share per pupil relative to Adjusted Equalized Weighted Assessed Value (AEWAV). This percentage is more than double the statewide average, demonstrating the burden already carried by our urban communities. (See attached file)

While RISE Prep may serve students from low-income families, it fails to address the systemic inequities its conversion would exacerbate. Those not chosen by the academy's lottery remain in an underfunded system, where essential services like social workers, ELL staff, and teacher aides—once partially supported by ESSER funds—are no longer affordable.

I urge you to refuse this application. Instead, focus on the real issue: reforming the education funding formula. The current system creates a stark divide between the haves and the have-nots, leaving urban districts to bear the brunt of its inequities.

Sincerely,

John F. Ward
Former Member, Woonsocket School Committee & City Council