



Funding of Charter Public Schools

Senate Bill 142

Senate Bill 142 amends the provisions by which charter public schools apply for state aid for reimbursement of school housing costs and further amends how school housing costs for charter public schools are calculated under the Rhode Island Board of Education Act.

The legislation would:

Increase the low reimbursement rate for school housing costs for charter public schools.

- Under current state law, public districts receive reimbursement rates between 35 and 92.7 percent depending on the district's wealth. **Charter public schools are reimbursed at a flat rate of 30 percent regardless of local wealth**, even though on average, they serve a higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch.¹
- Proposed amended legislation would calculate state aid for charter public school housing costs using a **three-year weighted average** of the state aid percentages for communities sending students to charter public schools.

Apply to projects completed after June 30, 2017.

- Proposed amended legislation would **not be retroactive** to previous projects. However, per current state law, school housing aid must be requested for a new project the year before that project is expected to be completed.

Require charter public schools attempt to utilize vacant school properties within the municipality where the charter public school is located before becoming eligible to access state housing aid.

- Proposed amended legislation would require the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education certify that a charter public school has **attempted to use vacant school property** and that such property would not be possible or practicable for the charter public school in the given municipality.

¹ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (n.d.), "The Public Charter Schools Dashboard: Students eligible for free and reduced priced lunch - Rhode Island 2012-13", Retrieved from <http://www.publiccharters.org/dashboard/students/page/lunch/state/Ri/year/2013>.



Why does RI-CAN support Senate Bill 142?

As the number and extent of needed renovations for Rhode Island's school buildings demonstrate, the current school housing aid program has not been able to fulfill its goal of guaranteeing all public students access to adequate learning space.

RI-CAN supports Senate Bill 142 because the amended legislation:

- **ENSURES EQUITABLE REIMBURSEMENT** - Charter public schools should have equitable access to school housing aid reimbursement. Students in Rhode Island's charter public schools should not be slighted for the inequities in the school housing aid process. The current process leaves charter public schools unprepared to provide adequate and equitable school facilities.
- **HELPS TO CREATE "GOOD" CONDITION FACILITIES** - In 2013, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) reported only one-quarter of district schools were in "good" condition and estimated the cost of bringing every school building up to this standard at \$1.79 billion. The average age of schools in the state is approximately 60 years, and many schools in need of repair and renovation to provide healthy and safe learning environments.² An increased school housing aid percentage would ensure all public schools are in "good" condition.
- **IMPROVES STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT** - Research shows that high-quality facilities help improve student achievement, reduce truancy and suspensions, and improved satisfaction and retention. The importance of facilities to health and student performance is well established.³
- **INCREASES NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH SCHOOL CHOICE** - Per a 2013 Rhode Island Facilities Survey, 89 percent of charter public schools in the state indicated they planned to increase their enrollment over the next five years.⁴ An increased school housing aid percentage would help charter public schools grow their facilities -- giving more families student choice.

VOTE YES ON SENATE BILL 142

For more information please contact Bill Fischer, external relations director, RI-CAN, at bfischer@northcomm.com or 401-281-9398.

² Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), "FY 2013 Public Schoolhouse Assessment", pp. 9, 15, and 72, Retrieved from <http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/School-Facilities/School-Construction-Program/FINAL-SCHOOLHOUSE-REPORT.pdf>.

³ 21st Century School Fund, Inc., U.S. Green Building Council, Inc., and the National Council on School Facilities, "State of Our Schools: America's K-12 Facilities (2016)," pp. 6, Retrieved from <https://kapost-files-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/published/56f02c3d626415b792000008/2016-state-of-our-schools-report.pdf?kui=wo7vkqVowWoLGSjxekoN5A>.

⁴ The National Charter School Resource Center, "An Analysis of the Charter School Facility Landscape in Rhode Island (2013)", pp. 17, Retrieved from <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:vphFWMMZyqsJ:www.richarterschools.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Charter-School-Facilities-Report-FINAL-2013-2.pdf+&cd=6&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=safari>.