



To: Senate Committee on Finance

From: Erich Haslehurst

Date: May 8, 2025

Re: S257 – RELATING TO PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES – RETIREMENT SYSTEM-ADMINISTRATION

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Finance Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the National Education Association Rhode Island and our 12,000 members to express strong support for Senate Bill 257, sponsored by Senator Felag.

As you know, in 2024, the General Assembly took a long-overdue step forward by adjusting the final average salary calculation from the highest five years to the highest three consecutive years for certain retirees. That change represented the first positive adjustment to the pension system in 38 years, and we deeply appreciate the leadership that made it possible.

However, not all eligible retirees were included in that change. Senate Bill 257 addresses this inequity by moving the cutoff date for eligibility from July 1, 2024, to July 1, 2012, allowing members who retire on or after the new cutoff to benefit from the updated calculation. This is a matter of fairness. Educators and public employees who have continued to serve faithfully throughout more than a decade of pension reforms should not be excluded from improvements simply because of an arbitrary date.

This bill ensures that our progress is not just real, but equitable. If we are to restore and strengthen the retirement security of Rhode Island's public workforce, we must continue to build on the reforms already passed—ensuring no one is left behind.

For many of our members, retirement benefits are modest and carefully budgeted. The difference between a final average salary based on three years versus five can have a real impact on retirees' monthly income, especially as they face rising health care costs and inflation. Senate Bill 257 honors the service of all eligible employees by treating them fairly.

We urge you to support this bill and continue moving Rhode Island's retirement system in a direction that is both sustainable and just.

Sincerely,

Erich Haslehurst

National Education Association Rhode Island