



To: Senate Committee on Finance  
From: Erich Haslehurst  
Date: May 8, 2025  
Re: S659 – RELATING TO EDUCATION – TEACHER'S RETIREMENT

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Members of the Finance Committee,

On behalf of the National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI) and our more than 12,000 members, we submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 659, introduced by Senator Britto.

This legislation would make a long-overdue improvement to Rhode Island's teacher retirement system by establishing a tiered pension benefit multiplier that increases with years of service. This means the percentage of a teacher's salary used to calculate their defined benefit pension would grow over time—rewarding sustained commitment to the profession with a more secure and equitable retirement benefit.

This structure reflects a basic principle of fairness: the longer an educator serves, the more they should be able to count on in retirement. Teachers who dedicate decades to the classroom are the backbone of our public education system. They deserve a retirement system that acknowledges the full value of their service.

In addition to correcting existing imbalances, S659 is a critical recruitment and retention tool. Aspiring and early-career educators are more likely to enter—and remain in—the profession when they see a clear, long-term pathway to financial security. At a time when schools across Rhode Island are struggling with staffing shortages and increasing burnout, this bill offers a meaningful incentive to build a full career in public education.

By passing this bill, Rhode Island would not only make its pension system fairer—it would also send a strong message to current and future educators: your service matters, and your future will be protected.

For these reasons, NEARI urges you to support Senate Bill 659 and strengthen retirement security for Rhode Island's public school teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Sincerely,

Erich Haslehurst  
National Education Association Rhode Island