

2026 -- S 2788

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- TRANSPORTATION OF SCHOOL PUPILS BEYOND CITY
AND TOWN LIMITS

Introduced By: Senators de la Cruz, and Rogers

Date Introduced: March 04, 2026

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 16-21.1-8 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-21.1 entitled
2 "Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The
3 Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended to read as follows:

4 **16-21.1-8. Statewide transportation system for all students.**

5 (a)(1) Notwithstanding the regional structure created in this chapter, and upon
6 implementation of a statewide school transportation system for all students, each school committee
7 shall purchase the transportation services for their own resident students by accessing this
8 integrated statewide system of transportation on a fee-for-service basis for each child; provided,
9 however, that any school committee that fulfills its transportation obligations predominantly
10 through the use of district-owned buses or district employees may apply for a variance from the
11 commissioner of education, or the commissioner's designee, thereby requesting that its
12 transportation obligations continue to be achieved through the use of the buses owned by the district
13 and staffed by district employees. All fees paid for transportation services provided to students
14 under the statewide system shall be paid into a statewide student transportation services restricted
15 receipt account within the department of elementary and secondary education. Payments from the
16 account shall be limited to payments to the transportation service provider and transportation
17 system consultants. This restricted receipt account shall not be subject to the indirect cost recoveries
18 provisions set forth in § 35-4-27. The goals of the statewide system of transportation for all students

1 shall be the reduction of duplication of cost and routes in transporting children from the various
2 cities and towns using different buses within and between each city and town, the improvement of
3 services to children through the development of shorter ride times and more efficient routes of
4 travel, and the reduction of cost to local school committees through achieving efficiency in
5 eliminating the need for each school district to contract for and provide these transportation services
6 separately.

7 (2) Any and all local education agencies and/or municipalities may contract out of the
8 statewide transportation system if they can find a more cost-effective option than the current fee-
9 for-service model as set forth in subsection (a)(1) of this section; provided, however, the local
10 educational agency and/or municipality shall demonstrate financial savings to the state education
11 commissioner in order to opt out of statewide transportation and contract transportation for their
12 students. If the education commissioner approves the request of the local education agency and/or
13 municipality to opt out of statewide transportation, then said local education agency and/or
14 municipality shall not be penalized in any and all state aid appropriations for contracting the service.

15 (b) There shall be deducted from the final aid payment to each school district any amounts
16 owed to the state at the end of the fiscal year for transportation of the district's students under the
17 statewide transportation system established pursuant to this section. Districts shall receive monthly
18 invoices summarizing the basis of the transportation fees charged. Any such deductions in aid shall
19 be transferred to the statewide student transportation services restricted receipt account, as set forth
20 in § 35-4-27.

21 (c) No school committee shall negotiate, extend, or renew any public transportation service
22 contract unless the contract provides for payments to school bus drivers, attendants, monitors, and
23 aides for one hundred and eighty (180) days or the length of the contracted-for school year,
24 whichever is longer.

25 (d) With respect to any contract entered into under this section, a school committee or local
26 education agency shall give a preference in contract and/or subcontract awards to the public
27 transportation provider that uses electric buses to the greatest extent. This preference shall be given
28 equal weight to any other preferences available to vendors.

29 (e) With respect to any contract entered into under this section, no school committee or
30 local education agency ("LEA") shall take any adverse disciplinary action against any school bus
31 driver, attendant, monitor, or aide covered by a collective bargaining agreement prior to any
32 investigation or action taken by the contracting entity as provided for in the collective bargaining
33 agreement. Nor shall the school committee or LEA impose discipline in excess of what is provided
34 for in the governing collective bargaining agreement.

1 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

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1 This act would provide local educational agencies and/or municipalities with a mechanism
2 to opt-out of statewide transportation and contract transportation for students, upon a showing of a
3 cost-effective alternative to the current fee-for-service model. If approved, the local agency and/or
4 municipality shall not be penalized in any and all state aid appropriations for contracting the service.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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