

2026 -- S 2849

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LC005357
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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 Gu, DiPalma, Vargas, E Morgan, Zurier, and Thompson

Date Introduced: March 04, 2026

Referred To: Senate Finance

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) Notwithstanding the regional structure created in this chapter, and upon implementation
6 of a statewide school transportation system ([the "statewide system"](#)) for all students, each school
7 committee shall purchase the transportation services for their own resident students by accessing
8 this 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. [In addition, should the individual school district utilize their own
14 buses or vendors at a lower cost than the statewide system, these costs shall be submitted to the
15 department of elementary and secondary education and reimbursed from state funds as in the case
16 with the statewide system.](#) All fees paid for transportation services provided to students under the
17 statewide system shall be paid into a statewide student transportation services restricted receipt
18 account within the department of elementary and secondary education. Payments from the account

1 shall be limited to payments to the transportation service provider and transportation system
2 consultants. This restricted receipt account shall not be subject to the indirect cost recoveries
3 provisions set forth in § 35-4-27. The goals of the statewide system of transportation for all students
4 shall be the reduction of duplication of cost and routes in transporting children from the various
5 cities and towns using different buses within and between each city and town, the improvement of
6 services to children through the development of shorter ride times and more efficient routes of
7 travel, and the reduction of cost to local school committees through achieving efficiency in
8 eliminating the need for each school district to contract for and provide these transportation services
9 separately.

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

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

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

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

30 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 that an individual school district that utilizes its own buses or
2 vendors to transport students outside the district, at a lower cost than the statewide school
3 transportation system, could submit these costs to the department of elementary and secondary
4 education and receive reimbursement from state funds.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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