

5165

Hello members of the House Education Committee, my name is Elizabeth Raducha. I live in Bristol, and I work as an Early Childhood Special Educator at Melville School in Portsmouth.

I've been an educator for 33 years. I have taught almost every grade and every subject from preschool to grade 11, in different parts of this country and even in other countries. There are many challenges that have remained the same throughout the years and in different parts of the world that I have witnessed. Number one being the importance of the students' mental health. Without ensuring social emotional well-being in our students there is very little we can do to help them learn and thrive.

At the Early Childhood level there is no doubt a residual struggle from the Covid years and the trauma of families experiencing the country's lock down and isolation.

There is drug and alcohol addiction afflicting more families than I've ever seen in the past and children being born with disabilities at an alarming rate because of it. There is familial abuse and neglect among adults and children that school faculty are trying to cope with and social services stretched to their limits so they are rarely seen as a resource for school support.

I am merely a cog in our young students' mental health. I can only help them while they are in my care. I can only help their families to the extent that applies directly to school-related issues but there is so much more that needs to be done.

When we consider the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development (RIELDS) and Common Core state standards, we are considering only the conditions that are OPTIMAL for a student to learn in. What happens when some or many of those students' mental needs are traumatized or ignored? It creates gaps in the students' abilities to learn even the most basic skills.

Investing money in the well-being of our children's and families' mental health is NEVER a waste or redundant. There will always be another family to help, another child in crisis but with added support, we can create a ripple effect that can carry over far beyond immediate need. It can equip those who need it most and, hopefully, spread the resources farther.

This legislation, H5165, would ensure we're paying attention to the needs of our students and working together to strive towards improvement and awareness for their community.

Please pass this bill so we can assist our children in being able to thrive in their education.

Thank you for your consideration,
Elizabeth Raducha