



January 25, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

This past Friday, I testified before a commission established by the Rhode Island House of Representatives investigating the impacts on local school districts from the 2010 State aid funding formula. I described how, in the current year, Providence is paying, with City tax funds, \$14.25 million in “tuition” to charter schools for Providence children enrolled in these schools, a number that likely will increase significantly over time. Of this amount, the City Council’s estimates indicate that at most one-half of the \$14 million is saved from not having the responsibility of educating these children, while the other half (\$7 million or more) represents payments that are not offset by savings. This \$7 million-plus loss results in a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the School Department budget, given our City’s budget realities (namely, the fiscal inability to substantially increase the local contribution to the school budget and the State “maintenance of effort” requirement that prevents reduction of that budget). Among other things, this loss of resources compromises the City’s ability to strengthen its network of neighborhood schools, a problem I described in an [opinion piece](#) published in last Tuesday’s Providence Journal. There is no question that our current network of neighborhood schools includes many in great need of improvement, and that parents in all neighborhoods desire and deserve a quality education for their children. With that said, the “cure” proposed by the “mayoral academies” community to replace neighborhood schools with pure City-wide (or cross-district) choice is worse than the disease, because our successful neighborhood schools depend in large part on neighborhood support, and our successful neighborhood schools are a key economic development tool to attract and retain the middle class in Providence.

In a recent [article](#), the Providence Journal described how the Mayor of Central Falls assisted the Providence Police in apprehending a car thief and recovering from a pawn shop some electronics the thief removed from the stolen car. A constituent researched this issue, and learned the value and importance to law enforcement when a homeowner retains a list of electronics serial numbers to review in the event of a theft. Existing laws and regulations impose “waiting periods” on pawn shops and require record-keeping by serial number which can assist in the recovery of stolen items and the apprehension of criminals. I have updated and expanded the [Crime Prevention Tips and Resources](#) section on my website to incorporate this new information, which appears in **red type**.

In the aftermath of the City Plan Commission’s rejection of the Bridgham Estate subdivision plan for Blackstone community group has organized a meeting for **this Wednesday, January 28 at 7:00 at Central Congregational Church, at 296 Angell Street**. The group invited Jason Martin of the City’s Historical District Commission, Paul Wackrow of the Providence Preservation Society and Bob Azar from the Providence Planning Department to discuss the possibility of seeking a local historic district designation for the neighborhood. Neighborhood members and the public in general are invited to learn about and discuss this process. On a related note, the City Council President assigned me to serve on the Historic District Commission; however, I do not know if I will accept this assignment due to separation of powers problems. In 2004, the citizens of Rhode Island passed a constitutional amendment to remove General Assembly members from State boards and commissions, and I see similar issues at the City level. In previous years, I have appeared before the Historic District Commission to advocate on behalf of constituents, and I have introduced legislation to regulate the Commission. If I were to accept a seat on the Commission, my City Council work would be compromised by potential conflicts of interest. With that said, I plan to consider this issue further before I make a final decision prior to Monday night’s Commission meeting.

Sincerely,