

SAM ZURIER

December 5, 2011

Dear Fellow East Siders:

Last week, the Education Subcommittee held a hearing on the Achievement First charter school application. We learned that the school recruits members from disadvantaged groups in its effort to close the achievement gap. This could affect the relative participation of children from the four host cities (Cranston, North Providence, Providence and Warwick) that would be eligible to attend the school. More specifically, Providence has a disproportionate number of children in poverty and/or from the African-American and Latino communities when compared to the other three districts. As a result, while Providence's enrollment is just under one-half of the total of these four districts, it is likely that a much higher percentage of Providence children would attend an Achievement First school. Tomorrow night (Tuesday, December 6) at 5:30 p.m., the Education Subcommittee will conduct a hearing to project the fiscal impact of the proposed new school on the Providence School Department budget. The estimated impact per child is fairly straightforward to calculate; however, the estimates for the number of Providence children who would attend the new school can vary more widely, and this will result in an estimated range of fiscal impacts rather than a single number. On the high end of the range, Providence may be looking at having to close a school to adjust for the enrollment declines resulting from the proposed schools on top of the very difficult school closures of this past spring. Teacher reductions also could generate seniority-based layoffs pursuant to a State law (R.I.G.L. §16-13-6) that ESPEC tried, unsuccessfully, to repeal, and which still remains both in effect and at odds with most of the school reform initiatives occurring both in our State and nationally.

Also last week, I worked on a series of "quality of life" initiatives that you have suggested to me over the past several months. The City Council passed for the first time an ordinance Councilman Salvatore and I co-sponsored to authorize the police to enact partial parking bans (such as single side of the street parking) during snow emergencies, something we need for narrow streets in the College Hill neighborhood. The Council also passed for the first time an ordinance I introduced to make it a ticketable offense to park within 12" of a driveway entry, as homeowners need some space on either side of their driveway clear when they are backing out or backing in. Also, the Finance Committee heard an ordinance I co-sponsored with Councilwoman Matos to fix the homestead exemption date to match the closing date for people moving into the City. This would correct an inequity that results when new homeowners do not gain the benefit of the homestead exemption during some or all of the first tax year of their residence and, conversely, it would remove from foreclosing banks the windfall of a homestead exemption for which they would not qualify. In the hearing, the Tax Assessor noted that a change to this system would create additional burdens on her office, and we are going to meet to discuss those concerns before voting on the bill in committee. The Tax Assessor also reported to the Finance Committee that she plans to canvass the entire tax roll in January to require all of us to re-apply for the homestead exemption. As part of that application, we will need to verify that we have registered all of our cars in Providence in order to retain the exemption, pursuant to a new law the Council passed last summer. It is my hope that this process will increase motor vehicle tax revenues for the City.

Sincerely,

