

Wanted: live-in teachers *Pro-To 12/6/*

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BOSTON, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit and Cleveland all have it — a residency requirement — and so does Providence. Having to live in the city for which you work has been deemed to be an important measure in helping to bring people back into the city, and that was the reason it was included in the 1980 Home Rule Charter.

It is a credit to the city that in the past five years, of the 633 new employees hired, only four have received exceptions, and these cases were well publicized. The requirement is there, and it has been adhered to assiduously.

City police and firefighters have raised questions on the issue, but the courts have ruled in favor of Providence, as they have in New York, where uniformed personnel must also abide by the requirement.

The local problem, however, is the teacher shortage in selected areas of the schools. Cognizant of this, Mayor Paolino has chosen a Residency Study Committee to examine the issue and make a recommendation to him in January. Business groups, as well as school and city officials, have addressed the committee, and a final public hearing will be held today.

Remember that the residency requirement came about as a means to stem a population decline in the city that averaged more than 2,000 people every year for 45 years, a trend that wasn't reversed until 1986.

Like other cities, it was primarily the middle class of Providence that moved to the suburbs: Teachers, police, firefighters and other city employees who contributed to the city economy, supported the schools, worked to improve city services, provided leadership for community and church organizations, and most important, were committed to improving the community in which they lived.

Housing prices may act as a deterrent for new city employees to move into the tenth most expensive market in the nation, but this ranking is deceptive because it covers the metropolitan area. In fact, Providence, exclusive of the East Side, has the lowest median price for a single family house in the state.

Indicative of the teacher shortage problem is the insulting pay a substitute receives: \$35 per day, with no benefits. Not required to be residents, substitutes can do better in any other system in the state, so why teach in Providence?

Faced with similar problems of teacher shortages, Connecticut raised its salaries two years ago. The result has been teachers returning to the classroom. But salary differences between Provi-

dence and any of the other 39 school districts are so minimal that there is no incentive to teach in the city. Rochester, N.Y. is paying its "master teachers" up to \$70,000 to teach in the toughest inner-city schools. There is no shortage there, and they get the best teachers.

Salary increases are long-term solutions, but in the meantime, the school department should be more aggressive and innovative in re-

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cruting new teachers. Right now, they do not even recruit potential teachers at Rhode Island College, the school with the largest education program in the state.

Changing the residency requirement for teachers opens the door to everyone else — police, firefighters, city employees and others — to leave the city. And this could mean a return to the population decline experienced in the past.

Problems in the school department do not warrant the change in residency requirement — a requirement, incidentally, that has brought about a dramatic 33 percent increase in new minority employees in the school department in the first three years after home rule.

Conditions are not yet good enough for Providence to drop the residency requirement. And that should be the committee recommendation to the mayor.

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