

# SMITH HILL REPORT

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## RIDE Regulations on School Takeovers

In 2022, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed a law requiring the K-12 Council to adopt regulations governing the return of state-controlled public schools back to local control. Specifically, Rhode Island law was amended to include the following provision:

**(d)(1)** The council shall adopt regulations providing for:

**(i)** The end of turnaround status; and

**(ii)** The transfer of the operation of a school district from the Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary education to the school committee and municipal control.

**(2)** The regulations shall include provisions to allow a district to retain measures adopted in a turnaround plan for a transitional period if, in the judgment of the commissioner, the measures would contribute to the continued improvement of the district. Such regulations shall also include provisions that clearly identify the conditions under which such a transitional period shall end and the powers granted to the commissioner and council under this section shall cease to apply to the district.

This past Fall, RIDE created proposed regulations to return schools to local control and conducted a public hearing process to solicit input on the proposal. The RIFTHP had several significant objections to the regulations and RIFTHP President Frank Flynn provided testimony and specific amendments to the proposed regulations at the November 29 public hearings.

The RIFTHP objected to a provision that called on the Commissioner to develop an analysis of the state takeover when the Commissioner is running Providence Public Schools. The RIFTHP asks for an independent review team to develop a report to be considered by the K-12 Council as it determines the timeline to return public schools to local control.

The RIFTHP called for public hearings regarding the return to local control before any proposed extension or conclusion of a state takeover is considered by the K-12 Council. The RIFTHP also provided testimony objecting to proposed regulations that would permit the extension of any 5-year takeover more than two years beyond the initial 5-year takeover timeframe.

To view the proposed regulations, [click here](#).

The amendments proposed by the RIFTHP can be viewed [here](#)

Providence Teachers Union President Maribeth Calabro also provided testimony at the following hearing. She emphasized the importance of having an independent review process of any state takeover. While Providence

Public Schools is currently operated by the state, the proposed regulations would govern the restoration to local control of any future state school district takeovers.

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education is scheduled to vote on the proposed regulations at its January 30, 2024 meeting.

### **Charter School Expansion Vote Scheduled**

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education (K-12 Council) is scheduled to vote on several charter school applications at its January 30, 2024 meeting. RISE Prep Mayoral Academy has proposed to lift the local cap that exists for Woonsocket because applications are lower than expected from the neighboring communities. This could lead to an increase of up to 200 additional students leaving Woonsocket Schools for the privately-operated charter school. The Woonsocket Teachers Guild testified against the proposal. Opposition was also registered by the Woonsocket School Committee, which noted that the annual cost to Woonsocket Public Schools is close to \$1 million. RIDE has recommended to the K-12 Council that the application for expansion be approved. By statute, the K-12 Council must consider the fiscal and programmatic impact a charter expansion proposal would have on public school students. It is unconscionable that the RIDE would recommend, for approval, a proposal that a local school committee has formally objected to based on fiscal and programmatic considerations.

Trinity School for the Performing Arts, an independent charter school located in Providence, has applied to add grades 5 and 6 to its secondary school and to increase the number of students per grade from 34 to 40. RIDE has recommended to the K-12 Council that the application for expansion be approved.

The K-12 Council is also considering the opening of a new school, the Medical Preparatory Academy, including students from Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence. The school will operate in the former Bishop Keogh school building in Pawtucket., The school is sponsored by the RI Medical Society. RIDE has recommended to the K-12 Council that the application for expansion be approved with conditions.

### **Senator Lawson New Majority Whip**

After the death of the former Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin during the 2023 session, the leadership position she held was not filled. The new Senate Majority Whip has been elected by the Caucus. Senator Valarie Lawson of East Providence is the new Senate Whip. She was first elected to represent Senate District 14 in 2018. Senator Lawson is the President of the NEA/RI.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn said “We are pleased that our friend and colleague Sen. Val Lawson has been elevated to the position of Senate Whip. As a career public school educator, she has a clear understanding of the challenges that working families face every day. She will be a strong advocate for all Rhode Islanders, and we look forward to working with her in her new role.”

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### **Bill Introductions**

#### **Worker Rights Education**

([H 7019](#), Spears, House Education)

This bill would establish a "workplace readiness week". It would require all public high schools, including charter schools, to annually observe that week by providing information to students on their rights as workers and would specify the topics that must be covered.

#### **Transparency In Arts Education Access And Proficiency Act**

([H 7020](#), Brien, House Education)

This bill would establish the Transparency in Arts Education Access and Proficiency Act ("TAEAPA") and promote education in the arts at the middle and high school levels by requiring each middle and high school to provide annual reports on the availability of, and percentage of students enrolled in, arts education courses.

#### **Teachers' Retirement - Social Security**

([H 7026](#), Serpa, House Finance)

This bill would require all public school teachers hired on or after July 1, 2024, to participate in the retirement system social security pursuant to chapter 7 of title 36.

#### **Office of Inspector General**

([H 7027](#), Nardone, House Finance)

This bill would establish the office of inspector general as an independent administrative agency charged with the responsibility to investigate, detect, and prevent fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in the expenditure of public funds.

### **Post Retirement Employment - Higher Education - \$25,000**

([H 7029](#), Hagan McEntee, House Finance)

This bill would increase the maximum post-retirement employment earnings from eighteen thousand dollars (18,000) to twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) a year for certain retired educators.

### **Civics Education Funding**

([H 7036](#), Speakman, House Finance)

This bill would establish a new categorical funding category for civics education. A new fund would be created and dedicated to civics education. This fund would be approved and implemented by the commissioner of elementary and secondary education pursuant to a request for proposal process.

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