

April 7, 2025

State Takeover- Individual School

On April 2, 2025, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee in strong support of [S 922](#), legislation that places critical limits on the state’s most invasive school intervention tool—full takeover. S 922 ensures that the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) may exercise complete operational control over only one school in one district at a time, curbing the state’s ability to impose multiple simultaneous takeovers without adequate planning or oversight.

Sencer testified and President, Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) that Rhode Island’s experience with the state takeover of the Providence Public School District (PPSD) underscores the urgent need for this bill. Since 2019, the state has exercised full control over PPSD’s budget, staffing, and academic programs with little transparency and no clear accountability. Despite years of promises, the district remains plagued by instability, while students, families, and educators continue to be excluded from key decisions.

Sencer argued that rather than empower communities, the state’s takeover of PPSD has alienated them. Instead of investing in local capacity, the state has spent millions on outside consultants with minimal ties to the district. The result has been disconnection, mistrust, and stalled progress—not the improvement that was promised.

S 922 provides an essential safeguard. It does not block state involvement or oversight but ensures that full state control—when exercised—must be targeted, manageable, and deliberate. By limiting RIDE to one such intervention at a time, the bill protects other communities from experiencing the same kind of overreach and dysfunction that has defined the Providence takeover.

RIFTHP urged the committee to pass S 922 and reaffirm the principle that school improvement must be collaborative, accountable, and rooted in the lived experience of educators, students, and families. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Providence School Takeover - Receivership

On April 2, 2025, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee in opposition to [S 860](#) and [S 861](#), by Senator Zurier, a coordinated legislative package that would further extend state control over public education by formalizing a receivership model. S 861, in particular, would allow the Commissioner of Education to appoint a receiver with full operational authority over the Providence Public School District (PPSD) a move that would deepen top-down governance and eliminate essential local oversight.

Sencer's testimony on [S 860](#) and [S 861](#) reflected RIFTHP's strong opposition to receiverships as a school improvement strategy and called instead for a shift toward collaborative, community-rooted alternatives. He emphasized that the state's control of PPSD has been marked by instability, lack of transparency, and the systematic marginalization of students, families, and educators. Despite years of direct control, the Commissioner has operated with virtually no public accountability, while community voices have been sidelined at every step. The result is a governance structure that has deepened frustration and failed to earn public trust.

Rather than correcting course, S 860 and S 861 double down on a discredited approach would transfer authority from the Commissioner to a state-appointed receiver, entrenching top-down control. S861 formalizes a receivership model based on the Providence takeover but drafted broadly enough to apply statewide, potentially subjecting other districts to similar interventions under vague definitions of chronic underperformance.

RIFTHP urged the committee to reject both bills and instead commit to a research-based, transparent, and inclusive model of school improvement—one that centers educator voice, community partnership, and shared accountability. The committee voted to hold the bills for further study.

Local 2012 Bargaining Rights

On Wednesday April 2, Peg Votta and Mike Mullane testified in support of legislation to preserve bargaining rights for employees at the Rhode Island Department of Education. [H 5227](#) is legislation championed by Representative Jay Edwards. The legislation is modeled after existing statute in education law ensuring that workers have collective bargaining rights notwithstanding the statutory authority of the Commissioner of Education and the K-12 Council.

AFT Local 2012 President Peg Votta provided testimony at the House Labor Committee hearing in support of the bill. She noted that the bill merely preserves bargaining rights the AFT members have had for over five decades. Bargaining rights were threatened in court filings last November that lawyers for Commissioner Infante Greene and the K-12 Council submitted, declaring that statutory rights of the employer negated the bargaining rights of workers. RIFTHP Field Representative Mike Mullane, who has negotiated contracts for AFT Local 2012 for over 30 years, provided history and context to the Labor Committee. He submitted a [letter](#) detailing the circumstances surrounded the threat to our members' bargaining rights.

Several AFT Local 2012 members also provided written testimony in support of the bill. Since the bill impacts all RIDE staff, AFSCME Council 94 supported the bill. Council 94 represents the classified staff at RIDE. RIDE Chief of Staff Krysafer Redden submitted a letter opposing the legislation. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

House Labor Testimony

The House Labor Committee heard testimony on several other important labor bills at the April 2 hearing. RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi submitted a [letter](#) in support of binding arbitration for municipal workers. RIFTHP members in four school districts bargain under the municipal employee law. Municipal bargaining already has binding arbitration on non-economic issues, but the arbitration award is only advisory on pay issues. [H 5135](#) by Representative Bennett would make the arbitration award binding on all issues. Parisi's letter supporting the bill noted that the legislation would be an incentive to bargain as both parties would likely want to avoid binding arbitration.

Parisi also submitted a [letter](#) in support of [H 5506](#) by Representative Craven. The bill would ban captive audience meetings where employers force workers to attend meetings that are not related to their job. Attendance at meetings of a political, religious or anti-union nature would not be mandatory under the bill. The House Labor Committee voted to hold the bill for further study. The legislation in an amended form passed the Senate Labor Committee last week and will be considered by the Senate on Thursday.

Freedom to Read

On April 3, 2025, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the House State Government and Elections Committee in support of [H 5726](#), the *Freedom to Read Act*. RIFTHP was part of a large and diverse coalition advocating for the bill. In addition to delivering oral testimony, RIFTHP submitted [written](#) remarks outlining its strong support. During the hearing, Sencer emphasized the broad base of support for the legislation—including educators, librarians, and community members—and underscored the urgent need to protect access to information in schools and libraries.

Access to diverse viewpoints is essential to democratic education and civic engagement. However, recent efforts to ban books and censor materials based on political or ideological objections pose a growing threat to these values. Many of these campaigns are politically motivated and seek to limit what students, educators, and librarians can access, teach, or share.

H 5726 ensures that decisions about educational and library materials remain in the hands of trained professionals—not political actors. It reinforces the First Amendment protections, upholds professional integrity, and explicitly protects school and library staff from liability when acting in good faith. The bill also safeguards existing, locally developed review processes by preventing politically motivated interference and prohibiting the use of funding cuts as a retaliatory tool.

The *Freedom to Read Act* is a timely and necessary affirmation of Rhode Island's commitment to free expression, professional judgment, and equitable access to knowledge. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

State Takeover- School Funding

Providence Mayor Brett Smiley has asked the Assembly to change the funding law for schools under state control to cut the amount of money the City gives to its public schools. Meanwhile, the Mayor is working on a plan to give a public-school building to an out-of-state charter school network. [H 5389](#) by Rep. Slater introduced on behalf of the City would limit the amount of school funding for school districts under state control. The RIFTHP submitted written testimony in opposition to the bill, similar to testimony submitted on the Senate proposal a week earlier. In his [letter](#), RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi opposed the measure that would cut funding for schools in most need of increased funding. He also informed the Committee that the RIFTHP is supporting legislation to prevent future state takeovers of entire school districts which would render the need to amend the funding statute moot. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Page Rate Vote

On April 2, the Rhode Island Senate unanimously approved legislation to increase the payment for court reporters and electronic court reporters who complete transcripts of court proceedings. The rate is set in state law at \$3 per page. [S 354](#) by Senator Dimitri would increase the rate to \$3.50 per page. The bill also provides for a 50 cents per page increase for official copies of the original transcript. AFT Local 4957 represents approximately 50 Court Reporters and Electronic Court Reporters working in Family and Superior Court.

This Week

- The House Education Committee will hear a bill requiring charter schools to be neutral if teachers and staff want to organize into a union on Tuesday
- The Senate Labor Committee will consider legislation on Wednesday to make it easier to fire a schoolteacher before the end of the school year
- The House Education Committee will hear legislation to restrict future charter schools to individual schools, not parallel school districts
- The Senate will be voting on Captive Audience Meeting legislation on Thursday
- The House Judiciary Committee will hear legislation on Thursday that would prevent federal immigration officials from detaining or arresting people on school grounds

Bill Introductions

Opioid Overdose Prevention Training - Higher Education

([H 5595](#), McGaw, House Education)

([S 464](#), Murray, Senate health & Human Services)

These bills would require that every institution of higher education provides training in the administration of opioid antagonists to every staff member on the institution's campus.

School Indoor Air Quality

([H 5597](#), Cotter, House Education)

This bill would provide that the Department of Health provide recommended air quality standards for schools. This bill would further provide that the Department of Education establish a program to test the air quality in schools and deficiencies in air quality would be addressed in the responsibilities of the school building authority pursuant to § 16-105-3. This bill would also provide that HVAC systems in schools achieve a MERV level of 13 where practical

School Personal Electronic Device Policy

([H 5598](#), Casimiro, House Education)

([S 771](#), Murray, Senate Education)

These bills would require every public school district to have a policy regarding the use of personal electronic devices on school grounds and during school-sponsored activities to reduce distractions and maintain environments focused on learning. The bill would also enable school districts to make exceptions to the policy.

Postsecondary Education Strategic Plan

([H 5601](#), Giraldo, House Education)

([S 20](#), Acosta, Senate Education)

These bills would assign additional duties to the commissioner of postsecondary education, including, but not limited to, preparing a strategic plan for public higher education which is aligned with the goals of the board of education's strategic plan, and which would provide for equitable distribution of public funds. These bills would also provide that any policies and goals adopted would have an outcomes-based model emphasizing outcomes across a range of variables.

Certification Of Teachers - PE

([H 5602](#), O'Brien, House Education)

This bill would eliminate any requirement that any person who is employed as a physical education teacher not be required to have a certification in adaptive physical education, unless they were hired after July 1, 2025.

5 Year Emergency Teacher Certificate

([H 5603](#), O'Brien, House Education)

This bill would allow emergency preliminary certificates for teaching to be issued for up to a total of five (5) school years.

Teacher Bill of Rights

([H 5604](#), O'Brien, House Education)

This bill would broaden the definition of "teacher" and create a comprehensive bill of rights for schoolteachers.

Arming Campus Police

([H 5666](#), O'Brien, House Judiciary)

This bill would mandate arming campus police at public higher educational institutions and would include campus police in the definition of "law enforcement officer" for the purposes of the "law enforcement officers' bill of rights".

Strikers' Benefits

([H 5680](#), Furtado, House Labor)

([S 587](#), Bissaillon, Senate Labor & Gaming)

These bills would allow unemployment benefits for workers who are on strike or are locked out of their workplaces by their employer due to a labor dispute.

Retirement Board Meetings - Online Access

([H 5715](#), Serpa, House State Government & Elections)

([S 514](#), Burke, Senate Judiciary)

These bills would require the state retirement board to publish online all archived video or audio recordings and all future recordings of meetings of the board.

Questions

RIFTHP members with questions about the Smith Hill Report or our legislative agenda may reach out to RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi at (401) 273-9800 or at jparisi@rifthp.org.

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