

March 20, 2023

Postsecondary Strategic Plan

On Wednesday, March 15, 2023, the RIFTHP offered brief testimony raising concerns about [H 5740](#). The bill, sponsored by Rep. Giraldo, would require the Postsecondary Commissioner to adopt a Strategic Plan that “directs public higher education to be accountable for increasing the educational attainment levels of Rhode Islanders,” “ensure increased degree production,” “realize statewide efficiencies through institutional collaboration and minimized redundancy in degree offerings” among other requirements. The bill also requires the adoption of a standardized course credit system among the three public higher education institutions.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi noted that the proposed statute was overly specific and, in some instances, problematic. He highlighted several issues raised in RIC AFT President Erik Christiansen’s written testimony ([click here](#)). Parisi testified that the union was concerned with devaluing the diploma by mandating degree production increases. He noted that some requirements run afoul of accreditation standards. He also described challenges of empowering the Postsecondary Commissioner to oversee credit transfer among all three public higher education institutions when URI was given its independence and its own Board several years ago. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights

The House Education Committee heard a half-dozen witnesses testifying against Rep. Bill O’Brien’s bill to create an Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights. The bill, [H 5499](#), is comprehensive and contains several requirements geared towards enhancing school safety and security. Some of the opposition arose from the bill’s support for School Resource Officers. Young Voices, a nonprofit organization, organized testimony against the bill. Objections were also raised about the bill’s wording that would stifle protests by students.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified on the legislation. He supported several aspects of the bill that would make school learning environments safer. He did object to several provisions in the bill that would require mandatory teacher training. Parisi has consistently testified that there cannot be any more required teacher training imposed by the General Assembly. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Mandatory Training – Students with Disabilities

The RIFTHP objected to mandatory teacher training in all schools that have students with diabetes at the House Education Committee hearing on March 16. [H 5546](#) by Rep. Diaz is nearly identical to a bill by Rep. Stewart that was heard by the same committee the prior week. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered brief testimony in opposition to the bill, repeating the union position that the Assembly should not enact additional training requirements for teachers. Parisi also repeated his concern that the bill would unsafely

permit education workers to perform medical procedures. Tim Ryan of the Superintendents Association also testified against the bill. Numerous Certified School Nurse Teachers offered written testimony against H 5546. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

School, Museum and Library Staff – Affirmative Defense

The RIFTHP joined a number of library and education organizations in offering written testimony in support of [H 6066](#) by Rep. Morales. The bill would create an affirmative defense if a library or museum employee is charged under the state obscenity statute. In our written testimony ([click here](#)), we highlighted the fact that forty-four states protect employees or institutions from prosecution under its obscenity statute. Rhode Island is one of six states, and the only New England state, not to have some statutory protection for librarians and other employees. As we witness the increased politicization of reading and instructional materials in libraries around the country, the RIFTHP promoted the idea that statutory protections should be extended to professional employees whose job it is to obtain educational materials.

Bill Introductions

Academic Standards Statute

([S 0187](#), Morgan, Senate Education)

This bill would repeal in their entirety sections 16-22-30, 16-22-31, 16-22-32 and 16-22-33, all of which relate to the establishment of statewide academic standards in mathematics, English language arts, science and technology, history, social studies, world languages and the arts and their implementation into the curriculum of all public schools.

Providence CBA Ratification

([S 0190](#), Zurier, Senate Education)

([H 5773](#), Kislak, House Education)

These bills would mandate, that during the remainder of the reconstitution and control period for the Providence School District, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education ratify any collective bargaining agreement entered into on behalf of the Providence Public School District at a public hearing held at least seven (7) days after the terms of a tentative agreement ratified by the union are made public.

Adjunct Faculty Medical Insurance

([S 0211](#), Miller, Senate Finance)

([H 5043](#), Hull, House Finance)

These bills would enable adjunct faculty members at any state college or university, who teach at least fifty percent (50%) of the hours regularly worked by full-time faculty in an academic semester, to be eligible for the same medical insurance as other state employees.

3% Retiree Stipend

([S 0215](#), Gallo, Senate Finance)

([H 5316](#), Serpa, House Finance)

These bills would provide all teachers and all state employees who retired prior to June 30, 2012 a one-time stipend in the amount of three percent (3%) of the lesser of either the member's retirement allowance or thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) of the member's retirement allowance. Any stipend after fiscal year 2024 would be subject to appropriation by the General Assembly.

Fractional COLA

([S 0222](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

([H 5240](#), McEntee, House Finance)

These bills would provide that the current COLA suspension schedule would be replaced with a fractional annual COLA of twenty-five percent (25%) of the COLA declared for that plan year, as it pertains to retired teachers, state and municipal employees.

Higher Education Post Retirement Employment - \$25,000

([S 0225](#), DiMario, Senate Finance)

([H 5039](#), McEntee, House Finance)

These bills 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.

Student Loan Forgiveness - STEM Teachers

([S 0229](#), Pearson, Senate Finance)

This bill would expand the Wavemaker Fellowship Program to include public school teachers, including public school teachers in the high-needs fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as health care professionals license by the Department of Health.

Education Aid - Full Categorical Funding

([S 0231](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

This bill would remove the language that requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to prorate funds available for distribution among school districts if the total approved costs of sought after reimbursement exceeds the amount of funding appropriated in any fiscal year. This bill would also eliminate the funding of the categorical programs pursuant to the transition plan in § 16-7.2-7.

Revenue for RI

([S 0232](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

([H 6148](#), Alzate, House Finance)

These bills would impose a tax on Rhode Island taxable income in excess of four hundred seventeen thousand five hundred dollars (\$417,500), to be adjusted for inflation, annually.

Student Success Factor - 45%

([S 0236](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

([H 6112](#), Casey, House Finance)

These bills would provide that in local educational agencies when over forty-five percent (45%) of the children have a family income that is at or below one hundred eighty-five percent (185%) of federal poverty guidelines then the student success factor will be fifty percent (50%) by the core instruction per-pupil amount.

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