
The SMITH HILL REPORT



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Senate Leadership

When the Rhode Island Senate convened on January 7, 2025, they elected new leaders and appointed new Committee Chairs. Senate President Dominick Ruggiero was re-elected on a contested 26-12 vote. Senator Valarie Lawson, President of the NEA/RI was appointed Majority Leader by the Democratic Caucus, a position formerly held by Senator Ryan Pearson who was unsuccessful in his efforts to become Senate President. The Caucus also chose Senator David Tikoian as the Senate Whip, a position formerly held by Senator Lawson. Senator Hanna Gallo, a retired Cranston Speech/Language Pathologist, was re-elected Senator Pro Tempore.

There were a number of changes in the leadership of the Senate Committee listed below. Once the rules are formally adopted, the Senate intends to create a new Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology, to be chaired by Senator Victoria Gu.

Senate Committee Chairs for the 2024-2025 session will be:

Labor	Frank Cicone , a retired Laborers Union Representative
Education	Hanna Gallo , replacing Senator Cano who did not run for reelection
Finance	Lou DiPalma
Judiciary	Matthew LaMountain , an attorney replacing Senator Euer
Commerce	Robert Britto , replacing Senator Sosnowski
Environmental	Susan Sosnowski , replacing Senator Di Mario
Health/Human Services	Melissa Murray , replacing Senator Miller who did not run for reelection
Housing/Municipal Gov't.	Jake Bissailon , replacing Senator Picard who did not run for reelection
Rules Oversight	Mark McKenney
Special Legislation	Walter Felag

Multilingual Learner Regulations

The Rhode Island Department of Education has proposed major revisions to the Regulations Governing the Education of English Language Learners, renaming them Regulations Governing the Education of Multilingual Learners. The proposed regulations have been posted on the RIDE website and are undergoing the public hearing process. The deadline for submitting written comments is Monday, January 20, 2025.

The RIFTHP has serious objections to a portion of the regulations in Section 3.12, the professional learning category. RIDE is seeking to impose a training requirement for all teachers similar to the requirement created by the Right to Read Act. Under the MLL regulation proposal, all teachers would need to “demonstrate awareness or proficiency in the knowledge and practice of MLL instruction” by September 2029.

The RIFTHP offered testimony in opposition to this work requirement at one of the six public hearings held in Newport on January 9. Woonsocket Teachers Guild President Robert Stewart testified at a hearing in Woonsocket on December 19, 2024. Several other RIFTHP leaders plan to testify at the final two hearings this week, to be held in West Warwick and Central Falls.

The RIFTHP testimony by James Parisi focused on the onerous work requirement placed on all educators. The work requirement is not funded nor is there specific time given to teachers and school districts to comply with the requirement. We also raised objection because the regulations suggest but do not require that additional training be provided during a teacher’s normal work day. The RIFTHP complained that the proposal was excessive and disrespectful of teacher time.

To view the Public Notice for the Regulations Governing the Education of Multilingual Learners, [click here](#)

To view RIFTHP talking points on the work requirement in Section 3.12, [click here](#)

Coming Up

The House and Senate will convene in a joint session on Tuesday, January 14 to receive the State of the State Address given by Governor Dan McKee. The Governor is expected to submit his budget proposal in the form of legislation on Thursday, January 16.

WEP/GPO Repeal Legislation Signed

As reported last week, on Sunday, January 5, 2025, President Joseph Biden signed the Social Security Fairness Act into law.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro and RIAFT/R President Roger Boudreau flew to Washington DC to join a dozen other AFT leaders at the bill signing session. Roger Boudreau penned an op-ed explaining the advocacy behind the legislative win in the Providence Journal ([click here](#))



RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro and President Joseph Biden

Smith Hill Report Distribution

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