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# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## Charter Moratorium Bill Approved by Committee

After listening to four hours of testimony, the Senate Education Committee approved the charter school moratorium legislation on an 8-1 vote. The virtual hearing and vote were held on Wednesday, January 27<sup>th</sup>. Frank Flynn and several RIFTHP leaders all spoke in support of the bill. Those leaders testifying on the bill included PTU President Maribeth Calabro, WTU President Darlene Netcoh, CFTU President Tracey Cavanaugh, and WTG President Bob Stewart. To view the RIFTHP written testimony ([click here](#)).

In addition to RIFTHP leaders, the NEA/RI and the Superintendent's Association testified in support of the bill. The RI Association of School Committees provided written support of the bill. Opponents included dozens of staff at Achievement First and parents of Achievement First students. There were other parents testifying against the bill whose names were submitted by the organization Parents Leading for Educational Equality.

Sponsor Maryellen Goodwin initiated the hearing by describing the need for the legislation. Among the committee members who were vocal in their support of the bill were Senator Hanna Gallo and Senator Pearson. Several Senators explained their support for the legislation on the fact that Providence schools and Mayor Elorza had no plan to handle the **\$80 million reduction** in funding for the Providence public school system should the expansion proposal go forward.

The Senate vote on the bill, [S0013A](#) has not yet been scheduled. The companion House bill to enact a three-year moratorium on charter school expansion was recently introduced by Representative William O'Brien ([click here](#)).

The Senate Education Committee lone nay vote was Senator Thomas Paolino. Senators voting in support of the bill were Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin, Senate President Pro Tem Hanna Gallo, Education Committee Chair Sandra Cano, Finance Committee Chair Ryan Pearson, Rules Committee Chair Lou DiPalma, and Senators James Seveney, Anna Quezada, and Jeanine Calkin.

## **RIFTHP Supports Commission of Education Appointment Legislation**

On Thursday, January 28, 2021, the RIFTHP offered written testimony ([click here](#)) in support of [S0063](#). The bill, sponsored by Senator Hanna Gallo, would change the appointment process for future Commissioners of Elementary and Secondary Education and Commissioner of Postsecondary Education. The bill would also amend the appointment process for the Secretary of Commerce and the Health and Human Services Secretary. Most importantly, the bill would provide some public process for the appointment of these individuals through the Senate Advice and Consent process.

The RIFTHP testimony focused on the lack of transparency in recent Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education selections and the need for some public awareness and input during the appointment process. The bill was approved unanimously by the Committee and will soon be considered by the full Senate.

## **RIC Bond Featured in March 2 Special Election**

Question 1 is the first in a series of seven state bond issues totaling \$400 million in investment in our infrastructure will go before voters in a special election to be held on March 2. Question 1 includes \$38 million for the renovation of the Clarke Science Building on the Rhode Island Campus. Funding for URI and CCRI infrastructure is also included in Question 1.

Please keep in mind the following dates:

- Tuesday, February 9<sup>th</sup>: Deadline to submit mail ballot applications
- Wednesday, February 10<sup>th</sup>: Early in-person voting period begins
- Monday, March 1<sup>st</sup>: Early in-person voting period ends at 4 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>: Special Referenda Election, polls open

Visit <https://vote.sos.ri.gov/Candidates/CandidateCalendar> for more information.

## **Bill Introductions**

### **Regulation of School Appliances**

([H5068](#) *McNamara, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

This bill promotes healthy school buildings and grounds by prohibiting the use of certain appliances such as those that are not energy efficient or burn fossil fuel in school buildings.

### **School Attendance Review Teams**

([H5071](#) *McNamara, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

This bill directs school districts experiencing high rates of student absenteeism to establish attendance review teams to address this absenteeism.

### **Elementary Student Discipline Restrictions**

([H5078](#) *McNamara, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

This bill requires that prior to any suspension being issued to a student or pupil in grades K-5, inclusive, the school would implement an individual behavior plan (the "plan") for the student.

### **Higher Education - Compensation of Athletes**

([H5082](#) *Solomon, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

This bill expressly allows college athletes, while they are students, to personally profit from the use of their name, image, and likeness, and prohibits the NCAA from preventing these practices.

### **Annual School Indoor Air Quality Testing**

([S0030](#) *Goldin, Senate Education*)

This bill requires the Department of Health, in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Management, to conduct indoor and outdoor air quality tests in all public and private schools throughout the state on an annual basis.

### **Substance Abuse Prevention Funding - Marijuana Fines**

([S0048](#) *Miller, Senate Health and Human Services*)

This bill expands drug awareness programs to high schools, directs funding from certain civil fines and mandates establishment of criteria for funding.

### **Substance Abuse Prevention Funding - DUI Fines**

([S0058](#) *Seveney, Senate Judiciary*)

This bill imposes a two hundred fifty-dollar (\$250) substance abuse education assessment for any conviction of driving under the influence or a violation for refusal to submit to a breathalyzer.

### **Safe Schools Act**

([S0073](#) *Ruggerio, Senate Judiciary*)

This bill prohibits possession of firearms on school grounds except for peace officers, retired law enforcement officers, persons under contract to provide school security services, and unloaded firearms in locked containers or a locked rack on motor vehicles.

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