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*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## **RIFTHP Executive Board Supports Providence Teachers**

The RIFTHP voiced its strong support for the Providence Teachers Union membership in their efforts to negotiate a fair contract. The PTU has remained committed to negotiate a new contract while dealing with a myriad of issues related to COVID, student testing, and ELL instructor requirements. Last week, the PTU members had an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the Commissioner and the Superintendent. Specifically, the RIFTHP voted as follows:

*"The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals Executive Council supports the leadership and members of the Providence Teachers Union in their attempt to gain a fair and just contract on behalf of the teachers and students of Providence. We fully support the vote of no confidence in Commissioner Infante-Green and Superintendent Peters."*

## **Charter Moratorium Hearing Continued**

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the House Finance Committee began a hearing on seventeen bills after 8:00 PM when a lengthy floor session debating climate change legislation delayed the start of the committee hearing. Hundreds of individuals were scheduled to testify on the charter school moratorium legislation introduced by Representative William O'Brien. Because of the delay, most testimony by witnesses on bills other than the moratorium were called that evening, testifying until 11:00 PM. Testimony will resume on Wednesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>.

## **School Air Quality Testing Proposed**

Senator Gayle Goldin proposed a bill, [S0030](#), that would require annual indoor and outdoor air quality testing in all Rhode Island schools. The RIFTHP offered written testimony in support of the bill when it was heard in the Senate Education Committee on March 24. In the letter ([click here](#)), RIFTHP President Frank Flynn

recounted recent efforts to upgrade school facilities after the Jacobs Report analyzed costs necessary to upgrade to “safe, warm and dry” conditions. Among the issues raised in the report were deficiencies in air quality.

Flynn also informed the committee that existing state law requires annual determinations on whether or not schools comply with state law and local regulations. The Senate Education Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

### **Early Retirement Bill Proposed**

Representative Deborah Fellela introduced a bill to permit teachers, state workers and municipal workers to retire provided they are at least age 60 and have at least 30 years of service. Most employees are eligible to retire at their normal social security retirement age but may retire if their years of service plus age equals at least 95. The “rule of 95” is currently available to those who are age 62 or greater. The Fellela legislation, [H5668](#), was heard in the House Finance Committee on March 23, 2021.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the legislation around 11:00 PM as the House Finance Committee hearing wound down. Parisi told the Committee that the 2011 pension changes championed by then Treasurer Raimondo were too draconian to public employees, particularly because they already paid for most of their pension benefit through high employee contributions. He noted that eligibility to draw on private sector 401(k) accounts is age 59½, so retirement eligibility at age 60 is reasonable. The Committee will pursue gathering more information about the costs of the legislation.

### **State Funding for Teacher Professional Development**

Legislation by Representative Pat Serpa was considered by the House Finance Committee during their late-night hearing on March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Her bill, [H5208](#), would re-establish school district committees charged with spending state funds dedicated to teacher professional development. The bill would allocate funding to districts at the rate of \$200 per student.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the Serpa legislation. He reminded Committee members that their used to be a dedicated state budget line item for teacher professional development, but that funding ceased after the 2008 recession and was never reinstated. He testified that two decades ago, when Massachusetts did its major education reform legislation, that the state dedicated \$200 per student for teacher professional development. Parisi also urged the committee to commit state funds for teacher training in preparation of revisions to curriculum currently being considered by RIDE, as well as other initiatives such as district requirements for increased ELL certification or endorsement and implementation of dyslexia legislation.

### **RIFTHP Testifies on ELL Certification Bill**

On Wednesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, the RIFTHP offered testimony on several education bills being considered by the House Education Committee. The RIFTHP offered testimony in support of legislation by Representative Biah to create a more streamlined path to an ELL certificate or endorsement. The bill, [H5829](#), would address several issues arising in districts that are increasing certification requirements for positions. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi spoke about the importance of the bill. He noted that disparities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island endorsement requirements should be looked into. He also lauded the portion of the bill that would create cohorts of teachers in districts to partake in classes at the school level. He suggested that the state budget provide funds to offset costs of the ELL certification requirements if there were district-wide initiatives requiring additional classwork.

### **Campaign to Support Vision Services Program**

The Rhode Island Department of Education is changing the funding of vision services offered to blind and visually impaired Rhode Island students. All ten teachers at the Rhode Island Vision Education and Services Program (RIVESP) were issued layoff notices. The teachers work out of the Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College providing services in most Rhode Island school district.

A group of parents have organized an electronic advocacy campaign to save the vision services program. To get more information and add your name to their growing list of supporters, [click here](#).

### **BILL INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **Education Services - State of Emergency**

([S0352](#) DiMario, Senate Education)

([H5159](#) Casimiro, House Education)

These bills would provide that physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech and music therapies and behavioral health services would be deemed essential special services that need to be provided to students with disabilities during times of a declared state of emergency. This act would also direct the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to promulgate rules and regulations to help provide these essential special services.

### **Education Funding - Enrollment Increase**

([S0353](#) *DiPalma, Senate Education*)

This bill would require the general assembly to establish an education aid fund to be administered by the department of education for increases in enrollment of at least twenty five (25) students.

### **Dual Language Immersion Curriculum Development**

([S0355](#) *Quezada, Senate Education*)

This bill would require the Department of Education to create a model policy and timeline to assist local education agencies in implementing a dual language immersion program. This model policy and timeline would be sent to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House.

### **Seizure Safe Schools**

([S0356](#) *DiPalma, Senate Education*)

([H5351](#) *Cortvriend, House Education*)

These bills would require all Elementary and Secondary Schools to have at least one school employee trained to administer or assist with the self-administering of seizure rescue medication prescribed to treat seizure disorder systems and the use of prescribed electrical stimulation and would also establish guidelines to authorize the administering of seizure medication in school.

### **Income Tax Increase - 5% for top 1%**

([S0362](#) *Mack, Senate Finance*)

This bill would add one new income tax bracket for purposes of Rhode Island state income taxation. The new bracket would be a rate of ten and ninety-nine percent (10.99%) on taxable income over four hundred thousand five hundred dollars (\$400,500) (in 2011 dollars). Adjusted for inflation, the new tax bracket would apply to taxable income over approximately four hundred seventy-five thousand dollars (\$475,000) (in 2020 dollars), impacting only the top one percent (1%) of taxpayers.

### **African American History Curriculum**

([H5697](#) *Williams, House Education*)

This bill would require implementation of education courses in African American history in elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island commencing in the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Parent Invitation - School Orientation**

([H5698](#) *Giraldo, House Education*)

This bill would require all public schools to send out written invitations to all parents, guardians or caretakers of students inviting those parents, guardians or caretakers to an orientation at the school.

### **Teachers of Color Scholarship Fund**

([H5699](#) *Williams, House Education*)

This bill would establish the "Increasing Opportunities for Teachers of Color Act". The act would provide for a

multifaceted approach to increase the quality of education in public urban and urban ring schools by promoting the development, utilization and opportunities for teachers of color. This act would further provide for a two million dollar (\$2,000,000) annual appropriation for a scholarship fund to develop teachers for employment in urban and urban ring schools. Preference for scholarship awards would be given to students of color, graduates of urban and urban ring communities and participants in teacher “Pathways” programs. Scholarship recipients would commit to work in an urban or urban ring school for one year for each year a scholarship award was accepted. Additionally, this act would provide for a two hundred thousand dollar (\$200,000) grant to the nonprofit Rhode Island School for Progressive Education. This grant would be awarded annually as approved by the general assembly.

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