

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Rally Scheduled in Support of RIVESP Teachers on April 13th

Ten teachers of the visually impaired and other staff supporting blind and visually impaired students were issued layoff notices after RIDE announced that they were putting the program out to bid. The teachers are members of the state-employed teacher local, Howard Union of Teachers (HUT). The teachers work in the Rhode Island Vision Education and Services Program (RIVESP) located at the Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College. HUT has filed legal action contesting the layoff notices. Parents and legislators have organized considerable support to keep the teachers and other staff who work with blind and visually impaired students. [Click here](#) to read a recent Op Ed piece by Dante Bellini. Parents are organizing a rally at the State House to save the program. The rally is Tuesday, April 13, 2021 at 3:00 PM. [Click here](#) to get more information.

Extension of RI Promise Program Bill Moves Forward

The Senate bill to extend the RI Promise program, a last-dollar scholarship program at CCRI, has been approved by the Senate Education Committee and will be considered on the Senate floor on April 13th. The companion bill, [H5224](#) by Speaker Shekarchi, was heard in the House Finance Committee on April 6th. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn wrote a letter supporting the bill and reminding the Committee of the need to extend the program to Rhode Island College as originally envisioned by then-Governor Gina Raimondo. To view Flynn's letter, [click here](#).

RIFTHP Supports ELL Certification Funding

The RIFTHP provided written testimony in support of legislation by Senator Ryan Pearson, [S0574](#), that would provide \$1 million funding for Rhode Island College to offer certification-related courses to teachers who work with English language learners. The issue has gained attention after the Providence Public School system displaced a number of teachers after they increased certification requirements for positions. Senator

Pearson's bill would fund coursework for teachers needing to obtain a variety of certifications related to teaching non English speaking students. To view a copy of the RIFTHP letter of support [click here](#).

Retiree COLA Bill Considered

The Rhode Island AFT Retiree chapter, along with other public employee retiree organizations, have submitted legislation to provide a fractional pension COLA every year instead of making retirees wait every four years for a pension adjustment. The Senate bill, [S0586](#) by Senator Susan Sosnowski, was heard in the Senate Finance Committee on Monday, April 5th. RIAFT/R President Roger Boudreau provided testimony in support of the bill. He supported the bill which would provide 1/4 of the COLA every year instead of the full COLA once every four years. He urged the Committee to obtain a pension analysis of the bill to provide legislators with information needed prior to enactment of any pension bill. The RIAFT/R has put together an electronic advocacy campaign in support of the legislation. If you are receiving a pension from the ERSRI and live in RI please add your support for the legislation by by Joining the campaign [here](#). If you are receiving a pension but do not live in RI please visit [this site](#) which will provide details on contacting the RI Senate President and the RI Speaker of the House.

Rally to Support Providence Teachers

Hundreds of Providence teachers and teachers from other districts including Pawtucket, North Providence, West Warwick, Lincoln and Central Falls held a rally on Tuesday, April 6th to support Providence teachers in their current negotiations with the State. Providence schools have been taken over by the state, and Commissioner Infante Green is in charge of negotiations on behalf of the Providence School Department. In addition to contract issues, the rally highlighted the need to raise revenue for education and community needs by raising income taxes on the wealthy. The rally also drew attention of the need to address the issue of the state takeover legislation as the takeover in Providence has been such a failure. The only result of state intervention in Providence schools has been the rapid acceleration of charter expansion.



School Funding Bills Considered

The RIFTHP supported a number of education funding bills heard this week. On Wednesday, April 7th the RIFTHP submitted written testimony in support of [S0090](#) by Senator Sandra Cano. The bill would add English Language Learner status to the factor used to determine the state share of education expenditure. Currently, Rhode Island calculates a per pupil cost every year. The state share is then increased 40% for all students eligible for free and reduced lunch. This additional 40% funding is the only funding adjustment to the base per pupil cost. S90 would increase state funding by 40% for all ELL students, including those who are ineligible for free and reduced lunch. The RIFTHP supports the bill because it would provide additional state funding to districts with high numbers of limited English proficient students. To view a copy of the RIFTHP testimony submitted by RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi, [click here](#).

The RIFTHP signaled support on several other bills being heard in the Senate Education Committee on April 7th. The RIFTHP supported [S0091](#), a bill by Senator Melissa Murray to have RIDE do a report on the appropriateness of the 40% funding adjustment for low income students. The RIFTHP also communicated its support of [S0353](#) by Senator Lou DiPalma. The bill would create a fund to provide school districts increased state funding when they experience a student population growth after October 1st, the date used to determine state education funding. This bill, along with several others considered this week, were derived from recommendations of the Senate Education Study commission report released two years ago. The RIFTHP declared its support of [S0351](#), a bill by Senator Ryan Pearson, which would maintain local education aid and determine a plan for communities that underfund its local share of education costs.

In a letter ([click here](#)) by RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi, the RIFTHP opposed a bill by Rep. David Place ([H6149](#)) to create an education savings account for parents whose students are learning remotely. The bill would have a devastating impact on local school budgets.

BILL INTRODUCTIONS

Sex Education

([S0463](#) Mack, Senate Education)

([H5604](#) Kislak, House Education)

These bills would amend the current law so that courses in family life or sex education would be taught in grades six through twelve and would be appropriate for students of all races, genders, sexual orientations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Teachings would recognize pleasure based sexual relations, different sexual orientations and be inclusive of same-sex relationships. These acts would also provide that instruction include gender, gender expression, gender identity, and the harm of negative gender stereotypes.

Recording of Closed Public Meetings

([S0512](#) *Paolino, Senate Judiciary*)

([H5032](#) *Newberry, House Judiciary*)

These bills would require that all meetings closed to the public be recorded by audio tape or other audio recording device.

Permanent Replacement of Striking Employees

([S0546](#) *Mack, Senate Labor*)

([H6089](#) *Henries, House Labor*)

These bills would prohibit an employer from permanently replacing an employee who has participated or honored a union authorized strike.

Public Employee Right to Strike

([S0548](#) *Bell, Senate Labor*)

This bill would provide for the right to strike for public sector workers in Rhode Island, including teachers, with exceptions for police officers, firefighters, 911 employees, and correctional officers.

Categorical Education Aid Full Funding

([S0571](#) *Murray, Senate Education*)

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.

\$2,000,000 for Afterschool and Summer Programs

([S0577](#) *Cano, Senate Finance*)

([H5211](#) *Casimiro, House Finance*)

These bills would provide two million dollars (\$2,000,000) to support comprehensive and effective afterschool, summer learning and workforce development programs for students in grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12).

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