

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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School Employee Assault Bill Heard

On Thursday, February 17th, the RIFTHP testified in the House Judiciary Committee in support of [H7303](#) by Representative Craven. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in person and submitted written testimony ([click here](#)). Under current law, if a principal, teacher, or supervisor is assaulted on the job and is absent from work, that person continues to receive full pay and is not charged her/his own leave while out of work. H7303 would extend this requirement to teacher assistants and other school employees, who work directly with students. The RIFTHP argued it was a matter of equity that administrators and teachers get full coverage if absent due to an assault, but that other school employees who interact directly with students receive a workers compensation benefit (not full pay) in the same situation. The Committee held the bill for further study.

RIFTHP Offers Testimony in House Education Committee

The RIFTHP offered testimony on two bills heard in the House Education Committee on Wednesday, February 16th. The RIFTHP offered support to the Climate Literacy Act. The bill, [H7275](#), was introduced by Rep. Courtvriend. It requires RIDE to convene stakeholders who would develop climate-related principles used when curriculum and curricular materials are being established in science, civics and social studies. There are other provisions of the bill related to enhancing climate literacy. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi supported the bill, noting that the bill does not create new course requirements but instead infuses existing course requirements with climate studies. He urged the Committee to provide funding and additional employees at the Rhode Island Department of Education in order to complete the work. A coalition of environmental groups, the NEA/RI and the AFL-CIO also supported the bill. The Superintendent's Association raised objections to the bill, arguing that the state cannot keep adding to the curriculum without taking other things out. The Committee voted to hold the bill, and others heard that afternoon, for further study.

The RIFTHP also testified on [H7274](#), a bill by Representative McNamara that would require school committees to notify RIDE whenever a teacher is terminated for cause. RIDE would then maintain the list of

terminated teachers that could be accessed by prospective employers. The list would not be subject to the open records act. The RIFTHP has some significant concerns particularly related to the privacy and security of the information. The union offered amendments to ensure that the termination list would not include non-tenured teachers whose contract can be non-renewed without meeting the good and just cause standard. The RIFTHP also sought to extend the requirement to charter school governing boards. Finally, the RIFTHP offered amendments to exempt from the list teachers who are terminated as part of a layoff based on program elimination, reorganization or fiscal exigency. We also oppose adding a name to the list while a termination is being adjudicated.

Additional RIFTHP Priorities Introduced

Revenue for Rhode Island

The RIFTHP is continuing to work in coalition with other unions and community organizations to increase income taxes on the wealthy. [H7440](#) by **Representative Karen Alzate** and [S2264](#) by **Senator Mellissa Murray**, would increase income taxes by 3% on income over \$500,000. The bill would only raise taxes on the top 1% of earners in Rhode Island, approximately 5,000 people. Both bills were introduced on February 11th and referred to their respective Finance Committees. S2264 has 25 cosponsors and H7440 has 33 cosponsors: Senators Acosta, Anderson, Bell, Burke, Calkin, Cano, Ciccone, Coyne, DiMario, Euer, Felag, Gallo, Goodwin, Kallman, Lawson, Lombardi, Mack, McCaffrey, Mendes, Miller, Pearson, Quezada, Seveney, Sosnowski, and Valverde and Representatives Ajello, Amore, Barros, Batista, Bennett, Caldwell, Casimiro, Cassar, Cortvriend, Craven, Diaz, Donovan, Felix, Fogarty, Giraldo, Handy, Henries, Hull, Kazarian, Kislak, Lombardi, McGaw, Messier, Morales, O'Brien, Potter, Ranglin-Vassell, Shanley, Slater, Speakman, Tanzi, Vella-Wilkinson, and Williams.

Charter School Enrollment Cap

Last session, the Senate passed a bill on the last day of the session that would cap the amount of money local school districts would have to spend on charter school tuition. The bill passed in an effort to address the charter expansion issue after the House of Representatives killed the charter school moratorium legislation. This year, **Senator Maryellen Goodwin** has introduced a bill similar to the bill being worked on at the end of last year's session. [S2319](#) would cap a district expenditure on charter tuition at 9% of a school budget, or 23% for districts under a state takeover. S2319 was introduced on February 15th and was referred to the Senate Finance Committee. The bill's co-sponsors are Senators Pearson, Gallo, Zurier and Seveney.

Human Services Minimum Wage

This past week, Senate legislation to increase the minimum wage for human services providers doing work on behalf of state agencies was introduced. [S2407](#) would create a \$21 minimum wage, with higher pay required for more experienced workers. **Senator Lou DiPalma** introduced the bill on February 15th. It was

referred to the Senate Labor Committee. Co-sponsors are Senators Ciccone, Miller, Valverde, Dimario, Lawson, Pearson, Kallman, Murray and Seveney.

Bill Introductions

Student Bill of Rights

([H7163](#) *Diaz, House Education*)

([S2288](#) *Quezada , Senate Education*)

These bills would provide students attending public schools enrolled in grades K-12 with a students' bill of rights prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, gender, economic status or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disabilities.

Secondary Student Sex Education

([H7166](#) *Kislak, House Education*)

This bill would amend the current law so that courses in family life or sex education taught in grades six (6) through twelve (12) shall 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. The bill would also provide that instruction include gender, gender expression, gender identity, and the harm of negative gender stereotypes.

Attendance Review Teams

([H7167](#) *McNamara, House Education*)

This bill would direct school districts experiencing high rates of student absenteeism to establish attendance review teams to address this absenteeism. The bill would also direct the State Department of Education to establish a chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan by January 1, 2023. The Bill would also direct the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to include each school district's absenteeism rate within the report on school discipline presented annually to the General Assembly, and to include the school or district's absenteeism rate in any report card or evaluation of the effectiveness of a school or district.

School COVID Recovery Plans

([H7168](#) *McNamara, House Education*)

This bill would direct all school districts to prepare district recovery plans by September 1, 2022 which would include strategies and targets for students, to address losses in student academic and social emotional learning which has occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. District recovery plans would be focused on the needs of students based on assessments, research and data analysis.

Children in DCYF Care - Rhode Island College Scholarships

[\(H7176\)](#) *Place, House Finance*)

This bill would provide a scholarship allowing a student in the care and custody of the Department of Children, Youth and Families to attend Rhode Island College without the payment of tuition and room and board as long as they meet the eligibility requirements of the program and the admission criteria of Rhode Island College.

Human Services Rate Review Process

[\(H7180\)](#) *Casimiro, House Finance*)

This bill would require the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) with the assistance of a twenty four (24) person advisory committee to provide expert review and recommendations for the process for rate setting and ongoing review of rate setting for all social and human service programs with a contract with or licensed by the state or any department of the state as well as Medicaid.

Licensure of School Psychologists

[\(H7184\)](#) *Diaz, House Health & Human Services*)

This bill would include licensed school psychologists under the provisions of the general laws governing the regulations of psychologists and provides specific qualifications applicants for licensing as a school psychologist must meet.

Interrogation of Juveniles

[\(H7188\)](#) *Kislak, House Judiciary*)

[\(S2370\)](#) *Anderson, Senate Judiciary*)

These bills would prohibit any questioning of a juvenile who is suspected of delinquent or criminal behavior unless the parent, guardian of the juvenile or the DCYF when parental rights are terminated is present, or unless an attorney is present, or the juvenile and their parent have waived their presence, or the court is satisfied that the juvenile has made a knowing voluntary waiver of their rights, or the juvenile is emancipated or has misrepresented their age as being eighteen (18) or older.

Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration

[\(H7198\)](#) *Bennett, House Labor*)

This bill would recognize that municipal employees have the opportunity to utilize interest arbitration and would establish new factors for the arbitrators to consider. These factors would include comparisons of wages and hourly conditions of employment in similarly skilled jobs. This bill would also grant the arbitrators power to render an award over all negotiated matters, including the expenditure of money.

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