
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Education Funding

On Monday, April 10th the House Finance Subcommittee on Education took testimony on the education funding formula and the Department of Education budget. To view the budget presentation by staff to the Committee, [click here](#). RIFTHP President Frank Flynn spoke at the hearing. He offered support for the additional \$45 million in education funding proposed by the Governor. He also spoke in support of additional state funding for English Language Learners. He said “We are particularly in favor of the additional 2.5 million dollar increase in categorical funding for ELL programs. This is one of the fastest growing areas of need in our schools and this revenue will allow our schools to provide additional programs and services for this population”

He also called on the Assembly to increase funding for the Central Falls School District, which is fully supported by State, not local revenue. Flynn told the Committee “Charter expansion has reduced the Central Falls school age population by over 35% forcing significant cuts to programming and staff. For example, the Central Falls High School does not even offer a music program. This would not be accepted or tolerated in any other district in the state. Regardless of anyone’s views on charter schools, it was never anyone’s intention that their proliferation would threaten the viability of a local school district.”

President Flynn added that “the Central Falls Board of Trustees is appointed by the K-12 council of the Board of Education based on nominations of the Commissioner. Because of this unique structure, this appointed Board would be competing with the very people who appoint them when advocating for additional revenue. There is definitely a lack of public advocacy for the Central Falls district, which is why I am here today.”

DSP Wage Increase

Three members of Center Employees Union 3726 testified in support of pay raises for Direct Support Professionals (DSP), who work with individuals with developmental disabilities. Robin Budzier, Markella

Carnevale and Anna Landolfi all testified before the House Finance Subcommittee on Human Services. The hearing was held on Tuesday, April 11th, to receive testimony on the budget of the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH). Governor Raimondo proposed a DSP pay increase in her budget request. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi and the three union members all supported the Governor's request and urged the committee to support her request.



Center Employee Union members from left to right:
Markella Carnevale, Anna Landolfi, Robin Budzier and Kristen Shaken

RIFTHP Opposes Mandatory TDI for Public Sector Workers

Two years ago, the General Assembly enacted a Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) program that allows up to four weeks of paid leave to care for ill family members. The TCI benefits are available to all workers who participate in the Temporary Disability Insurance program (TDI). Legislation to expand the four weeks of TCI leave to six weeks was introduced by Senator Gayle Goldin. However, the bill also contained a provision requiring state workers, municipal workers and teachers to participate in the employee-paid TDI program.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified against [S0678](#) in the Senate Labor Committee on Wednesday, April 12th. While he offered support for the TCI benefit expansion, he said the RIFTHP could not support the bill with the public sector mandate. He told the committee that the TDI program began in 1942, decades before public sector workers won collective bargaining rights. Once unions began bargaining, they negotiated leave benefits to make up for not being able to participate in TDI. He reminded the committee that the law was amended in 1998 to permit state workers to participate in TDI through the negotiations process, something the RIFTHP supported at the time.

Spring Break

The General Assembly will be in recess for school vacation week and will reconvene on Tuesday, April 25th. There are no committee hearings during the break.

Bill Introductions

Pension COLA – Retired Prior to July 1, 2012

[\(S0736\)](#) Crowley, House Health Education and Welfare)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would grant an annual increase of three percent (3%) cost-of-living retirement adjustment on the first fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) of a retiree's annual allowance, until the funded ratio of the pension funds, calculated by the retirement system's actuary on an aggregate basis, exceeds eighty percent (80%).

Student Debt Reduction

[\(H5750\)](#) Marszalkowski, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would establish a reduction in interest program to be administered by the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority. The program would provide that students with eligible student loans who work and reside in Rhode Island for a period of at least two (2) years after graduating from college or university would be eligible to a two percent (2%) reduction in the interest rate on their eligible student loans. No person would be eligible to participate in the program during any period that payment on the person's loan was deferred.

ELL Funding

[\(H5751\)](#) Diaz, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would amend the State Aid Funding Formula for compensation of school districts for the additional costs of students learning English.

Resolution on DSP Wage Increase

[\(H5839\)](#) Tanzi, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this resolution respectfully urging the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to increase certain direct and home care worker wages.

Student Loan Forgiveness Program

[\(H5889\)](#) Shanley, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would establish the "Get On Your Feet Loan Forgiveness Program" in Rhode Island, to assist recent college and university graduates in the repayment of their

student loans, by providing for payments to eligible students to be applied towards their student loans. To qualify for the program, the student must meet eligibility requirements which include, but are not limited to, being a resident in Rhode Island, being employed in Rhode Island, if employed, and to have income of less than sixty thousand dollars (\$60,000) per year.

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