

---

*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



*PUBLISHED BY* THE RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS/AFT, AFL-CIO

---

June 12, 2017

## **Contract Continuation Advocacy Continues**

The primary legislative priority this session for the RIFTHP is enactment of legislation to ensure a teacher or municipal worker contract continues until a new agreement is negotiated by the parties. The RIFTHP Fact Sheet on the bill ([Click here](#)) summarizes why the bill is needed. The Johnston Federation of Teachers President, Kathy Kandzierski, spoke to the Johnston elected officials in support of the bill this week, and other local leaders have reached out to their delegation to add their support.

## **Pension COLA Restoration**

On Thursday June 8, the House Finance Committee heard testimony in support of legislation to restore a modest COLA for retirees. The bill, H 5504 by Representative Duffy Messier, would create a 3% COLA on the first \$15,000 of pension benefits every year.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi and AFSCME Council 94 lobbyist Jim Cenerini testified in support of the bill. Other union lobbyists signed up in support as well. RIAFT/R President Roger Boudreau submitted a letter of support. ([Click here](#))

Parisi told the Committee that the proposal was a modest benefit that provides a maximum increase of \$450/year or about \$35/month. The COLA under Raimondo's pension reform only provided a .74% increase, and that is the only increase for the next four years. Parisi noted that the stock market is at historic highs and a modest benefit should be provided for retirees. He asked for clarity on the legislation to ensure retired teachers and municipal workers were included in the proposal.

## **ELL Funding Formula**

The RIFTHP offered a letter of support ([Click here](#)) on [H5751](#) by Rep. Grace Diaz that would make the one-time state funding of English Language Learners (ELL) a permanent feature of Rhode

island's education funding formula. Last year, the Assembly provided \$2.5 million to support education programs of ELLs. The Governor proposed making the funding permanent in her budget proposal. The bill was heard by the House Finance Committee on June 7. The RIFTHP has previously testified in support of the issue when the House Finance Committee considered [Article 18](#) of the State Budget.

### **Tax Credits for Public School Infrastructure**

On Wednesday June 7<sup>th</sup>, the RIFTHP offered support for legislation that would create a state tax credit for donations to public schools. The bill, [H5748](#) by Representative Joseph Solomon, would provide an 8% tax credit on individual or corporate donations over \$10,000 dedicated to making "physical improvements" to the schools. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill in the House Finance Committee.

Parisi told the Committee that he had previously testified against expanding private school donation tax credits because there was not a similar benefit offered to those who donate to public schools. While the 8% tax credit pales in comparison to the overly-generous 90% private and religious school tax credit, Parisi told the Committee that it was a good step forward. As an aside, Parisi reminded the Committee that the private and religious school donation is so generous that businesses actually make money on their donation because they get a state tax credit and also can deduct the donation on their federal tax returns.

Parisi also expressed support for Rep. Solomon's bill because the donations would be dedicated to infrastructure, not school operations. He reminded the Committee that there is a crisis in school facilities and H5748 was a sensible measure to help address the problem.

### **Firearms in Schools**

The RIFTHP provided a letter of support ([Click here](#)) on on legislation that would prohibit a person who has a concealed and carry gun permit, to possess a gun on school grounds. In Rhode Island, there is currently a prohibition on possessing a gun on school grounds but there is a loophole for individuals with permission to carry a concealed weapon. The RIFTHP joined a large number of school committees and other advocates in support of the legislation. The bill, [S0187](#) by Senator Harold Metts, was heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee on June 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **Teacher Survivor Benefit Increase / Investment Transparency Bills Move Forward**

Two bills supported by the RIFTHP unanimously passed the House Finance Committee on Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup>. [H5071 Substitute A](#) Substitute A by Representative Gregg Amore, would provide a 10% increase

in Teachers Survivor Benefits with a modest \$19 annual contribution increase by the teacher and a \$19 annual contribution by the school committee. Survivor benefits are provided for teachers whose districts do not participate in Social Security.

The Finance Committee also approved [H5923](#) by Rep. Lauren Carson. This bill, introduced on behalf of General Treasurer Seth Magaziner, would ensure that the public is informed of investment fees paid to money managers of state funds. The State Investment Commission is charged with investing Rhode Island's pension money. Certain money managers, particularly hedge fund managers and private equity managers, have been paid exorbitant fees while not generating a solid return. This bill would ensure that future investment fees are made available to the public.

### **BILLS on the Move**

The following bills have passed the Committee process and the full chamber of either the House or the Senate. To be enacted into law, the bill must pass the same process in the other chamber before being sent to the Governor for approval.

#### **House Study Commission – School Start Time**

[\(H5888A\)](#) *Casimiro, House Finance*)

This bill would create a House Study Commission to investigate changing the start times of Rhode Island public high schools. The RIFTHP will have one appointment on the commission.

#### **Substance Abuse Prevention Education**

[\(S0306\)](#) *House Health Education and Welfare*)

[\(H5177A\)](#) *O'Brien, House Floor*)

These bills would require the department of elementary and secondary education to consider incorporating substance abuse education and suicide prevention into the health education curriculum.

#### **Career and Technology Education Funding Formula**

[\(S0437A\)](#) *Gallo, House Health Education and Welfare*)

This bill would provide that the department of education in consultation with a workgroup composing of various stakeholders, would develop a funding formula for school districts sending students to career and technical programs outside the district. The RIFTHP will be represented on the work group.

#### **Public Records Exemption – Public Higher Education Research**

[\(S0177\)](#) *Sosnowski, House Judiciary*)

[\(H5098\)](#) *Hagan McEntee, Senate Judiciary*)

These bills would provide that preliminary drafts, notes, impressions, memoranda, working papers and work products including those involving research at state institutions of higher education on commercial, scientific, artistic, technical or scholarly issues, whether in electronic or other format, would not be deemed a public record for purposes of public access to public records.

### **Title 16 Study Commission**

[\(S0556 DiPalma, Senate Passed\)](#)

This Resolution would create a fourteen (14) member special legislative commission whose purpose it would be to conduct a comprehensive review and make recommendations to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of the Postsecondary Commission and any other state agency regarding the updating, streamlining and ensuring relevance of the laws contained in Rhode Island General Laws Title 16, and who would report back to the Senate no later than March 1, 2018, and whose life would expire on July 1, 2018. The RIFTHP will be represented on the Study Commission.

**SIGN UP  
NOW!**



register to receive the SHR directly, [click here](#).