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# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## **Student and Teacher Classroom Safety**

The House Education Committee heard testimony on [H7526](#), legislation establishing a framework governing student removal from classrooms due to chronic disruption or safety concerns, along with required administrative responses and documentation.

The bill would allow teachers to remove students who are chronically disruptive or pose an immediate safety threat, while requiring schools to develop return-to-classroom plans before a student can re-enter the classroom. It also establishes a formal administrative review and documentation process to ensure consistency and accountability in how removals are handled.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in person, along with Field Representative Sean Doyle and Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer. Testimony emphasized the importance of maintaining safe and orderly classroom environments while ensuring that policies include appropriate supports, clear procedures, and protections for both educators and students.

The committee heard testimony on the bill and held H7526 for further study.

## **Prevailing Wages For Charter School Employees**

The House Labor Committee heard testimony on [H8248](#), legislation that would establish and enforce prevailing wage and benefit requirements for teachers and administrators employed in Charter Public Schools and Mayoral Academies.

The bill directs the RIDE to determine, monitor, and enforce prevailing compensation standards, including authority to investigate complaints, conduct audits, and require restitution for unpaid wages and benefits.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) in support of the legislation, and Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified in person. Testimony emphasized the need to ensure that Charter School educators receive fair and equitable wages and benefits comparable to other Public School educators, and that the state fully enforce existing labor standards.

RIFTHP also highlighted concerns regarding significant disparities between executive compensation in some charter organizations and the wages of classroom educators, underscoring the importance of accountability and fair distribution of public education funding. Testimony further supported extending prevailing wage protections to Mayoral Academies, ensuring consistency across publicly funded schools.

The committee heard testimony on the bill and held H8248 for further study.

## **Dyslexia Definition Alignment**

On Tuesday, March 17, RIFTHP offered testimony in support of legislation updating Rhode Island's approach to literacy and dyslexia identification. [H7909](#) was heard in the House Education Committee.

The bill updates the statutory definition of dyslexia within the Rhode Island Literacy and Dropout Prevention Act to reflect current research and best practices, improving how schools identify and support students with reading challenges. The legislation strengthens the state's commitment to early literacy and evidence-based instruction.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in person, emphasizing the importance of early identification and targeted supports to ensure students with dyslexia receive the instruction they need to succeed. Testimony highlighted that improving literacy outcomes is critical to closing achievement gaps and preventing long-term academic challenges for Rhode Island students.

The committee heard testimony on the bill and held H7909 for further study.

## **DNC Chair Ken Martin Meets With RI Labor Unions**

Democratic National Committee Chair Ken Martin visited Rhode Island for a series of events focused on strengthening partnerships with organized labor and supporting pro-worker policy and candidates.

During his visit, Martin met with labor leaders from across the state and toured a school construction site in Johnston, highlighting the importance of continued investment in public infrastructure and good union jobs. RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro participated in the tour, representing the voice of educators and school employees in conversations about school facilities and workforce standards.

Following the tour, Martin participated in a forum at the IBEW Hall, where he engaged directly with union members and leaders. The discussion focused on the future of the Democratic Party, the importance of standing with working people, and the need to support candidates who prioritize strong public services, fair labor standards, and economic opportunity.

The visit underscored the continued role of organized labor in shaping policy and political priorities, and the importance of ensuring that workers' voices remain central in state and national decision-making.



*Field Representative Jeremy Sencer, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro, DNC Chair Ken Martin, and GLO President Michael Ziegler (L-R)*

### **RIFTHP Kicks Off Campaign To Put Communities Before Billionaires**

RIFTHP has launched the Communities First campaign, calling on Governor McKee to withdraw support for the billionaire-backed De La Comunidad Charter School and urging the General Assembly to pass legislation to place a moratorium on charter schools and lower the statewide charter cap ([S2787](#) / [H7415](#)).

The campaign directly challenges the growing influence of out-of-state billionaire funding in Rhode Island's education system, raising concerns about efforts to bypass local input while advancing charter expansion that diverts resources from neighborhood public schools.

RIFTHP is making a significant investment in this campaign, with advertising running across English and Spanish-language media, along with coordinated outreach to communities most impacted by charter expansion. The campaign underscores how a parallel charter system has increased administrative costs, strained municipal budgets, and worsened inequities, particularly as district schools continue to serve the majority of high-need students.

Members are encouraged to take an active role by sharing campaign information and using the website to directly contact the Governor. This is a critical moment to ensure that Rhode Island's education policies put communities first—not out-of-state billionaire interests.

Learn more and take action at [ricommunitiesfirst.com](http://ricommunitiesfirst.com).

Read the full press release [here](#)

## Save The Date - RIFTHP Lobby Day April 28<sup>th</sup>

RIFTHP members are mobilizing for a **Lobby Day at the Rhode Island State House on Tuesday, April 28**, bringing the full strength of our union directly to Smith Hill.

This event is about **union power in action**. Rank-and-file members from across Rhode Island will come together to **directly lobby legislators**, advocate for our priorities, and ensure that decision-makers hear from the people most impacted by their votes.

Lobby Day is one of the most effective ways to turn member engagement into real legislative wins. When members show up, share their experiences, and speak with a unified voice, we build the power needed to **pass policies that support public education, protect workers, and invest in our communities**.

A strong turnout will demonstrate that RIFTHP members are organized, engaged, and ready to fight for what our schools and communities need. **This is how we build power—and win.**

### This Week

- On Tuesday, the House Judiciary Committee will hear a bill that requires public higher education institutions to arm campus police officers and expands their status under state law enforcement protections.
- On Tuesday, the House Education Committee will hear a bill that requires school districts to fill any remaining open seats after initial enrollment with other students residing within the same district.
- On Tuesday, the House Education Committee will hear a bill that requires school districts to provide at least one fee-free payment option for school meals and disclose any transaction fees charged by payment platforms.
- On Wednesday, the Senate Education Committee will hear a bill that prohibits colleges and universities from charging students for health insurance unless the student affirmatively opts into coverage.
- On Wednesday, the Senate Education Committee will hear a bill that allows certain students to qualify for in-state tuition rates at Rhode Island public higher education institutions regardless of residency status.

### Bill Introductions

#### **Rhode Island Hope Scholarship**

**([H 8336](#), McNamara, House Finance)**

This bill would convert the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship from a pilot program into a permanent scholarship program at Rhode Island College.

#### **Teacher Suspension Salary Repayment**

**([S 3137](#), DiPalma, Senate Labor and Gaming)**

This bill would require teachers suspended for criminal conduct to repay any salary received during the suspension if convicted of a felony, excluding amounts paid for taxes and employee benefits.

### **State Aid to Libraries**

([S 3130](#), *DiPalma, Senate Finance*)

([H 8168](#), *Cortvriend, House Finance*)

These bills would increase reimbursement caps for library construction and renovation projects and apply the updated caps to eligible costs incurred between June 30, 2025 and June 30, 2031, or earlier if regulations are amended.

### **State Tax Exemption for Public Pensions**

([S 3129](#), *Thompson, Senate Finance*)

([H 7162](#), *Casimiro, House Finance*)

These bills would allow a modification to federal adjusted gross income to exempt public pension benefits administered by the Employees' Retirement System of Rhode Island from state income tax.

### **State of Emergency School Day Waiver**

([H 8326](#), *Biah, House Education*)

This bill would allow school days canceled due to a declared state of emergency to count as excused days for purposes of meeting minimum school day requirements.

### **Payment of Wages**

([S 3049](#), *Dimitri, Senate Labor and Gaming*)

([H 7960](#), *Corvese, House Labor*)

These bills would eliminate certain prescribed timelines for hearings and determinations in wage enforcement actions before the Department of Labor and Training to align with current practices.

### **School District Regionalization Study Commission**

([S 3009](#), *Acosta, Senate Education*)

This resolution would create a commission to study shared services and the potential regionalization of school districts and report findings to the Senate by April 15, 2027.

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#### **Questions**

RIFTHP members with questions about the Smith Hill Report or our legislative agenda may reach out to RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer at (401) 273-9800 or at [jsencer@rifthp.org](mailto:jsencer@rifthp.org).

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