

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

April 13, 2026

PPSD Local Control



RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro

The Senate and House Education Committees held hearings on companion legislation ([S2526](#) / [H7414](#)) to end the continuation of the Providence Public Schools state turnaround plan and establish a firm transition back to local control by June 30, 2026.

Testimony in support was led by Providence educators, municipal leaders, and community advocates calling for a return to local governance paired with a structured transition plan. RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in person, emphasizing that while the community has been clear in its desire to regain control of Providence schools, the transition must be deliberate, supported, and not “a switch flipped overnight.” She stressed that RIDE has a responsibility to support the district through a clear and accountable transition process.

RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified that the state takeover has marginalized the Providence community, destabilized the educator workforce through constant turnover, and diverted millions of dollars to outside consultants without delivering meaningful improvements for students. He argued that RIDE’s refusal to plan for a transition reflects a lack of accountability, and that establishing a firm statutory end date is necessary to compel good-faith action and the development of a real support plan. He also noted that the General Assembly has already acted to prohibit future district takeovers, reflecting broader recognition of the failures of the Providence intervention.

Support for the legislation also came from Providence Mayor Brett Smiley, School Board President Ty’Relle Stephens, members of the City Council, and numerous community members, all underscoring the need to restore local authority and rebuild trust in the district.

Opposition testimony was presented by RIDE, Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE), and Superintendent Javier Montañez, who argued that the turnaround efforts require additional time to produce results. When pressed by committee members, the Superintendent was unable to identify specific transition supports that would be put in place, reinforcing concerns raised by supporters about the lack of a clear plan.

Across both hearings, committee discussion focused on the June 30, 2026 transition timeline, accountability for state-led reforms, and how to ensure sustained support for Providence students and educators moving forward. Both bills were held for further study.

Insurance Benefits For DD Providers

The House Health & Human Services Committee heard legislation ([H7330](#)) that would allow private employees at nursing homes, developmental disability providers, and home care agencies—whose wages are largely publicly funded—to opt into the state employee health insurance plan.

Testimony in support highlighted the need to stabilize the direct care workforce and ensure equitable access to affordable health coverage for workers delivering publicly funded services. Anna Landolfi, President of the Trudeau Center, testified in favor of the bill, emphasizing the challenges providers face in recruiting and retaining staff due to limited benefits. [Written testimony](#) submitted by RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer reinforced that these workers are essential to Rhode Island’s care infrastructure yet are excluded from the benefits afforded to comparable public-sector roles. SEIU also testified in support, noting that many of their members would be directly impacted and that improved benefits would strengthen workforce retention.

Concerns raised during the hearing focused on cost implications and implementation details, particularly ensuring that expanding access to the state plan would not increase costs for current participants. Committee members also raised questions about how premiums and employer contributions would be structured.

The bill was held for further study



Trudeau Center Employees Union President Anna Landolfi

Municipal Employees Arbitration

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in support of [S2409](#), legislation strengthening binding arbitration rights for municipal employees and clarifying the factors arbitrators must consider in contract disputes. The bill reinforces arbitration as a fair alternative to strikes and ensures decisions reflect real-world labor market conditions, including comparable wages, working conditions, and job requirements. RIFTHP emphasized that these updates promote equitable outcomes, strengthen collective bargaining, and support stable labor relations for municipal workers across Rhode Island. The bill was placed on the Senate Calendar.

Workforce AI and Monitoring Protections

RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) in support of [S2499](#), legislation establishing safeguards around the use of artificial intelligence and electronic monitoring in the workplace. RIFTHP highlighted the growing use of workplace surveillance and automated decision-making systems in education and healthcare, emphasizing the need for transparency, limits on data collection, and meaningful human oversight. The testimony underscored that these protections are critical to preserving professional judgment, preventing bias, and ensuring fair working conditions. The bill was held for further study.

Student Device Location Privacy Protections

RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) in support of [S2786](#), legislation that prohibits schools from accessing or using student device location data except in limited circumstances, strengthening student privacy protections. The bill responds to growing concerns about digital surveillance in educational settings and ensures that tracking technologies are not used in ways that undermine student rights or trust. RIFTHP emphasized the importance of clear guardrails as schools increasingly rely on technology in the classroom. The bill was held for further study.

This Week

On Wednesday, the Senate Education Committee will hear bills that:

- require updated school security protocols, including coordination with law enforcement and emergency preparedness planning in K-12 schools.
- allow teachers to extend their certification without cost under certain conditions, addressing workforce retention and licensure barriers.
- require schools to develop transition plans for students with 504 plans, supporting continuity of services and accommodations.
- limit or modify the use of out-of-school suspensions, impacting student discipline policies and school climate.
- expand access to higher education opportunities for students with disabilities, strengthening pathways from K-12 to postsecondary education.

On Wednesday, the House Labor Committee will hear bills that:

- allow public employees to engage in strikes under certain conditions, significantly changing current restrictions on collective labor actions.
- establish binding arbitration for municipal employees to resolve labor disputes, affecting how contract negotiations are finalized.
- require employers to remain neutral during public employee union organizing efforts, impacting workplace organizing conditions.
- create new protections governing the use of artificial intelligence and electronic monitoring in the workplace, addressing employee privacy and oversight concerns.
- hold individuals accountable for workplace discrimination, expanding potential liability beyond employers.
- prohibit limitations on healthcare providers in collective bargaining agreements, affecting how employee health benefits are negotiated and structured.

On Thursday, the House Finance Committee will hear bills that:

- allow teachers to receive retirement credit for time spent on approved medical or parental leave, addressing gaps in service accrual.
- allow public employees to retire when their age and years of service total eighty-five, modifying current retirement eligibility rules.
- exempt public pension income from state taxation, affecting retirees' take-home income and state revenue.
- change how final average salary is calculated for employees hired after 2012, impacting retirement benefit levels.
- restore full cost-of-living adjustments for post-2012 retirees, increasing pension growth over time.
- revise the final average salary calculation for certain retirees who left service after 2009, affecting pension benefit amounts.
- increase survivor benefits for eligible beneficiaries of public pension members, improving financial security for families.
- restore cost-of-living adjustment increases tied to inflation for members of the state retirement system.
- extend the number of days retired public employees may return to work without impacting their pension benefits.
- allow public employees to retire when their age and years of service total ninety, modifying current retirement eligibility rules.

Bill Introductions

Unfunded Mandate Opt-Out

([S 2239](#), Morgan, Senate Finance)

This bill would allow school districts to opt out of complying with state mandates that are not fully funded through the state education aid formula. It would give local districts discretion to determine whether to implement unfunded requirements based on available resources.

Graduate Student Medicaid Reimbursement

([S 2241](#), DiMario, Senate Finance)

([H 7795](#), Fogarty, House Finance)

These bills would allow Medicaid reimbursement for services provided by graduate student interns working under an approved supervisory protocol. They would expand the pool of reimbursable providers to increase access to care while supporting workforce development in clinical fields.

Higher Ed Post-Retirement Employment

([S 2247](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

This bill would expand the positions that retired members of the state retirement system could hold at public colleges and universities after retirement. They would allow greater flexibility for institutions to rehire experienced workers while maintaining their retirement status.

School Safety Plans – First Responder Access

([S 2280](#), Patalano, Senate Judiciary)

([H 7897](#), Solomon, House Education)

These bills would require all schools to develop and implement safety plans that ensure first responders have immediate access to school facilities during emergencies. They would standardize emergency response protocols to improve coordination and response times in critical situations.

Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities

([S 2349](#), DiMario, Senate Education)

([H 8161](#), Cortvriend, House Finance)

These bills would establish the Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Act. They would create a framework to expand access to postsecondary education programs and supports for students with disabilities in Rhode Island.

Seizure Safe Schools

([S 2350](#), DiPalma, Senate Education)

([H 7481](#), Fogarty, House Education)

These bills would require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Health to adopt policies for the administration of seizure rescue medications for students with epilepsy or seizure disorders. They would ensure that schools are prepared to respond quickly and safely to seizure-related medical emergencies.

Take Action!

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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.

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