

The

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RIFTHP Holds First-Ever Lobby Day, Showcasing Member Power at the State House

RIFTHP made a strong showing at the State House this week, hosting its first-ever Lobby Day and bringing together hundreds of members from across Rhode Island for a coordinated day of advocacy. Educators from K–12 and higher education, along with public employees, filled the halls and chambers, meeting directly with legislators and reinforcing RIFTHP’s growing political strength.

The energy throughout the building was undeniable. Members engaged in direct conversations with legislators about the issues affecting their workplaces and their students. These were not symbolic visits—members came prepared, spoke with purpose, and made sure their voices were heard at a critical moment in the legislative session.

“Our members showed exactly what collective action looks like,” said RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro. “When union educators and public employees join together and speak directly to decision-makers, it has a real impact. This is how we build power and improve conditions for our members and the communities we serve.”

Throughout the day, members advocated for key priorities, including a charter school moratorium and cap reduction ([H7415/S2787](#)), Rule of 90 pension improvements ([H7390](#)), and classroom safety legislation ([H7526/S2524](#)). These conversations connected policy directly to real-world impact and reinforced how decisions at the State House affect classrooms, campuses, and public services across the state.

“This was an important step in continuing to build our political power,” said Jeremy Sencer. “As the largest labor union in Rhode Island, our members are showing that we are organized, engaged, and ready to play a more active role in shaping the decisions that impact our professions and our communities.”

RIFTHP’s Lobby Day marked a clear step forward in building sustained member engagement and political strength. With a strong and visible presence at the State House, members made clear that RIFTHP will be an active and influential voice in shaping policy in Rhode Island—and a force in the political landscape in the months ahead.



Funding Formula

RIFTHP submitted testimony in support of legislation that would modernize Rhode Island's outdated school funding formula to reflect the real cost of educating today's students in public schools that serve all children.

The current formula, established more than 15 years ago, was built for a different era and no longer reflects the realities facing Rhode Island's public schools. Districts are managing rising fixed costs—such as transportation, facilities, and healthcare—while also serving students with increasingly complex needs. As a result, resources are too often pulled away from classroom instruction, putting pressure on schools that are responsible for educating every student who walks through their doors.

The bill adopts the recommendations of the Blue-Ribbon Commission and represents a significant shift in how the state approaches school funding. Rather than relying on a base instructional cost, it moves toward identifying and funding the actual cost of educating each student, including multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro testified in person and submitted [written testimony](#) in support of the bill, stating, “This proposal shifts our focus from simply calculating a base instructional cost to identifying the actual cost of educating every Rhode Island child.” The proposal also drew strong support in committee, including testimony from former Congressman David Cicilline and several Rhode Island mayors.

RIFTHP supports this legislation as a critical step toward building a more equitable and sustainable funding system that protects classroom resources and strengthens public education across Rhode Island.

Central Falls Governance Transition Bills Heard in House and Senate Finance

RIFTHP submitted testimony in support of companion legislation that would return the Central Falls School District to local control and establish a sustainable funding structure to support that transition.

Heard in both the House and Senate Finance Committees on the same day, these bills represent the final step in ending more than 30 years of state control over Central Falls schools. The legislation repeals the state trusteeship and allows the newly established hybrid school board—made up of elected and appointed community members—to assume full authority on July 1, 2026, restoring decision-making power to local families, educators, and stakeholders.

The bills also establish a Central Falls Stabilization Fund to ensure long-term fiscal stability as the district transitions to local governance. By covering high-cost expenditures such as out-of-district special education placements and other variable costs, the fund provides a critical safeguard to prevent financial instability and protect classroom resources.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) in support of both bills, highlighting the extensive work of the Special Joint Legislative Commission—chaired by former RIFTHP Field Representative James Parisi—that helped shape this proposal. She emphasized that “governance is not just about balance sheets—it is about the commitment of a community to its own children.”

RIFTHP supports this legislation as a historic step toward restoring local control while ensuring the financial stability necessary for Central Falls students and educators to succeed.

Voucher Firewall Bill Heard in House Finance

RIFTHP submitted testimony in support of legislation that would protect public education funding by requiring legislative approval before Rhode Island participates in any federal school voucher tax credit program.

Voucher-style programs have raised concerns nationwide about accountability, transparency, and the diversion of resources away from public schools. This bill establishes an important safeguard by ensuring that any decision to participate in such a program must be approved by both the General Assembly and the Governor, rather than through unilateral executive action.

The legislation is being led by NEA Rhode Island, and RIFTHP joined in support to reinforce the importance of maintaining strong, well-funded public schools. RIFTHP Field Representative Jeremy Sencer testified in person and submitted [written testimony](#), stating, “Decisions that could redirect public education funding must be made transparently and with full legislative oversight.”

RIFTHP supports this bill as a necessary step to preserve transparency, accountability, and sustained investment in Rhode Island’s public education system.

Rhode Island Hope Scholarship

[Written testimony](#) submitted by RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer supported legislation to make the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship a permanent program at Rhode Island College, emphasizing the institution’s critical role in preparing Rhode Island’s workforce in education, healthcare, and public service fields. The testimony highlighted that the scholarship has increased in-state student interest in Rhode Island College and expanded access to an affordable four-year degree, while stressing that a long-term commitment to the program will strengthen workforce development, support student success, and help retain talent in Rhode Island.

Expanding Health Benefits to Adjunct Faculty

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro testified before the House Finance Committee in support of legislation to expand state health benefits to adjunct faculty teaching at least half of a full-time course load, joined by Rhode Island College adjuncts and Field Representative Mike Mullane. In his [written testimony](#), Mullane highlighted the inequity in current law, where adjunct faculty are excluded from benefits because their work is measured by course load rather than hours. [Written testimony](#) submitted by RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer further emphasized that adjunct faculty perform duties comparable to half-time state employees and that aligning eligibility with teaching load would promote fairness, improve retention, and strengthen the higher education workforce.

This Week

Wednesday, May 6 – Senate Education Committee

The committee will hear several education bills focused on student support and school programs, including proposals that:

- Strengthen classroom safety policies and establish procedures for removing disruptive students while outlining protections for students and educators.
- Create a pilot cultural exchange program to expand learning opportunities for Rhode Island students.
- Update the definition of dyslexia and enhance literacy and dropout prevention efforts for students with reading challenges.
- Expand access to free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for three- and four-year-old children.

Thursday, May 7 – House Finance Committee

The committee will hear a bill that creates a new tax bracket for the highest-income earners by applying an additional tax rate to income over \$640,000 to generate revenue for state investments.

Bill Introductions

Stabilizing School Funding Amid SNAP Data Disruptions

([H 8511](#), Morales, House Finance)

This legislation would increase funding for high-need students by raising the student success factor in the state's education funding formula and stabilizing aid for districts affected by fluctuations in SNAP-based poverty data. The bill is intended to prevent artificial funding losses and ensure that school aid continues to reflect actual student need rather than changes in federal program participation.

Day of Action Honoring Senator Dominick Ruggerio

On Saturday, May 9 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the WaterFire Arts Center in Providence, labor members and community partners will come together for a day of service honoring Senator Dominick Ruggerio's legacy, assembling and distributing food baskets to support Rhode Island families, with members welcome to participate for any portion of the event.

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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