

The

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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

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## March 4 Day of Action

The RIFTHP and its locals participated in a day of action organized by the AFT in support of public education funding now under attack in Washington DC. Educators wore red on Tuesday as we marched forth in a virtual rally to oppose the dramatic federal funding cuts now being considered by Congress and the White House. The RIFTHP appreciates the hundreds of our members participating in the event throughout the State.



*RIFTHP leaders participated in the March 4 Day of Action*

## School Psychologist Minimum Staffing

On Tuesday, March 4th, the House Education Committee held a hearing on [H.5338](#), a bill requiring at least one certified school psychologist for every 500 students in Rhode Island schools. In support of this critical legislation, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) emphasizing the urgent need for increased mental health support in schools to address student well-being and academic success. Additionally, RIFTHP organizer Jeremy Sencer provided testimony, highlighting the challenges faced by students and educators due to the shortage of school psychologists and underscoring the importance of investing in mental health services. Their advocacy reinforced the need for this bill to ensure that all students have access to the psychological support they deserve.

### **Revenue for Rhode Islanders**

On Tuesday, March 4, the Revenue for Rhode Islanders Coalition held a press conference in support of legislation that would increase taxes on income over \$625,000 to support important programs and services. The RIFTHP is a founding member of this coalition, having led efforts for many years to make taxes more fair and raise needed revenue for education and other vital public services. Bill sponsors Senator Melissa Murray and Representative Karen Alzate spoke in support of the measure at the press event held in the Senate Lounge. Additional speakers included AFL-CIO President Patrick Crowley, NEA/RI Vice President Amy Mullen, Reverend Duane Clinker, and advocates for childcare and public transportation.



*Members of the Revenue for Rhode Islanders Coalition with bill sponsors and legislative champions, Representative. Karen Alzate and Senator. Melissa Murray.*

### **Freedom to Read Coalition Formed**

The RIFTHP attended the press conference announcing the formation of a coalition to support the Freedom to Read. The phrase refers to protecting public librarians from unfair prosecution triggered by complaints about books and materials they procure. The coalition also organized to oppose efforts to ban books and materials that are appropriate for our public libraries. The coalition press conference held in a packed State House Library began with bill sponsors Senator Mark McKenney and Representative David Morales.

### **RIDE Budget Hearings**

The House Finance Committee was scheduled to consider the Department of Education budget on Thursday, March 6. That meeting has been rescheduled for Tuesday, March 18.

### **This Week**

- The URI budget will be heard in Senate Finance on Tuesday
- The Freedom to Read legislation will be heard in the Senate on Wednesday
- Senate Labor will consider legislation on captive audience meetings and defining employee under the state labor relations act on Wednesday.
- The DCYF budget will be heard in House Finance on Thursday

### **Bill Introductions**

#### **School District - All-Charter Model**

([H 5337](#), Place, House Education)

This bill would allow charter schools to engage in nontraditional approaches to learning, which must be reviewed by the department of education, and would also require that seats allocated to a charter school, whose charter has not been renewed, be reallocated to a school which offers nontraditional approaches and methods to learning. Additionally, this bill would permit local communities to adopt an all-charter school public school model for public education. This bill would provide that adoption of this model would require an affirmative vote of the local municipality's council and school committee, followed by an affirmative vote on a referendum on the adoption, at a special or general election in the municipality.

#### **School Psychologist Minimum Staffing**

([H 5338](#), Casimiro, House Education)

This bill requires at least one certified school psychologist per every five hundred (500) students to be employed at each school system.

#### **Standardized Testing -- Certification of Teachers**

([H 5339](#), O'Brien, House Education)

This bill would provide that until July 1, 2027, an applicant for a teaching certificate in Rhode Island would not be required to complete a standardized teacher's examination as a prerequisite to obtaining a teaching certificate.

#### **School Committee Elections - Age of Eligibility**

([H 5382](#), Felix, House State Government & Elections)

This bill would allow citizens of a city or town who are at least sixteen (16) years of age to register to vote and to vote in school committee elections in municipalities where school committees are elected entities.

#### **State School Takeover - Fiscal Authority**

([H 5389](#), Slater, House Finance)

This bill would remove the authority of the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to withhold funds from a debtor community through the general treasurer. It also limits the increase of contributions by the school or school district to twenty percent (20%) of the legislative increase in any levy by the city or town where the school or school district is located. Further, it requires an appointment by an

auditor by the General Assembly to review and report on expenditures performed by the Rhode Island Department of Education for the school district which is the subject of any intervention.

### **Student Success Factor Increase**

([H 5398](#), Felix, House Finance)

This bill would revise the calculation for the student success factor in the education-aid formula by adding an additional multiplier of twenty-five percent (25%) for each resident child who is identified as a multilingual learner as well as for each resident child whose family income is below one hundred eighty-five percent (185%) of the federal poverty guidelines.

### **School Spending Reduction - Unfunded Mandates**

([H 5399](#), Hopkins, House Finance)

([S 0334](#), Morgan, Senate Finance)

These bills would provide on and after July 1, 2026, a school district could elect and choose to not spend money on any mandate that is not fully funded through the state education aid formula or of any other state funding received through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

### **Public Employee Early Retirement Penalty Reduction**

([H 5407](#), Bennett, House Finance)

This bill would reduce the current varying percentages for early retirement penalty for teachers, municipal and state employees to a cumulative annual reduction of three percent (3%) and monthly reduction of twenty-five hundredths percent (.25%).

### **Government Contracts - Nonprofit Disclosure**

([H 5454](#), Serpa, House State Government & Elections)

([S 0579](#), Burke, Senate Judiciary)

These bills would require any nonprofit, as a condition for requesting state funds from the General Assembly, to submit and to post on their website, a detailed list of ten of their highest paid director, officer and employee salaries, and any forms of compensation provided to those individuals. It would require further the disclosure to include fundraising, endowments, trusts, memorial giving and/or any and all activities that fund the nonprofit.

### **Right To An Adequate Education**

([H 5459](#) Messier, House State Government & Election)

([S 0177](#) Acosta, Senate Education)

These amendments to the Constitution of the State, if approved, would provide that it would be the paramount duty of the General Assembly, the Department of Education, and other government agencies to provide Rhode Island residents with equal opportunities to receive an education that is adequate, equitable and meaningful effective January 1, 2027.

## Questions

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

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