

March 17, 2025

Freedom to Read

On March 12, 2025, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee in support of [S 238](#), the Freedom to Read Act. RIFTHP was part of a large, diverse coalition supporting this legislation. In addition to verbal testimony, RIFTHP submitted [written testimony](#) further outlining its strong support for the legislation. During testimony, Sencer highlighted the broad range of organizations, educators, librarians, and community members who stand behind this bill, emphasizing the widespread recognition of the importance of intellectual freedom and access to diverse literature.

Intellectual freedom is the foundation of literacy, education, and democracy. However, recent efforts to ban books and censor educational content pose a serious threat to these core values. Many of these censorship efforts are politically motivated, restricting students' and the public's access to diverse perspectives and important literary works.

S 238 ensures that authors retain the right to share diverse ideas and that library patrons have unrestricted access to a broad range of materials without undue interference. By enacting this bill, Rhode Island affirms its commitment to intellectual freedom and the educational growth of all its residents. The Senate Education Committee held the bill for further study at the March 12 hearing



RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee

School Library Act

On March 12, 2025, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee in support of [S 0639](#), the School Libraries Act. In addition to verbal testimony, RIFTHP submitted [written testimony](#) further outlining its strong support for the legislation. Sponsored by Senators Gallo, McKenney, Tikoian, Raptakis, LaMountain, and DiPalma, this legislation seeks to ensure that every public school in Rhode Island has a dedicated school library space managed by a certified school librarian.

Sencer testified that decades of research, including findings from the American Library Association and the American Federation of Teachers, demonstrate that well-resourced school libraries with certified librarians significantly improve student achievement, literacy rates, and critical thinking skills. A 2020 study from the School Library Journal found that students in schools with full-time librarians scored 10–20% higher on reading assessments than those without such resources. Unfortunately, disparities in library funding and access have limited these benefits for many Rhode Island students.

To maximize the impact of this bill, RIFTHP emphasizes the importance of involving union librarians in determining the structure of extended library access beyond school hours. Their expertise ensures that additional services are effectively designed to meet student needs while maintaining high educational standards.

Seizure Safe Schools

On Tuesday, March 11, the RIFTHP raised several objections to legislation that requires the adoption of regulations governing the care of students with seizure disorders. [H 5491](#) by Representative Kathy Fogarty would adopt a uniform seizure action plan to be used throughout the public school system. The regulations to be adopted by RIDE and the Department of Health would permit school employees to volunteer to administer anti seizure medication in an emergency situation.

In his testimony, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi supported the notion of having a uniform statewide seizure action plan. He raised concern about non-medically trained school workers issuing anti-seizure medications in a crisis situation. If the provision were to remain, Parisi asked that the bill be amended to prevent school employees from being coerced into volunteering to administer the anti-seizure medication.

In addition, Parisi objected to a provision that would require all school employees working in a school with a student with a seizure action plan to get mandatory training. Parisi noted that training requirements already approved for the Right to Read act and the recent MLL Regulations are added time requirements to teachers that would be exacerbated by additional required training imposed on this, and other bills.

The RIFTHP offered to work with bill proponents and bill sponsors to come up with language to protect teachers and school employees from more onerous training requirements, ensuring that, at a minimum, training be done during normal work hours.

Definition of Employee – Labor Relations Act

On Wednesday March 12, the Senate Labor Committee took testimony on legislation making significant revisions to the RI State Labor Relations Act. Among the changes proposed in the bill is expanding the definition of an employee as one who is both a student and a worker. The FIFTHP offered [written testimony](#) and verbal testimony in support of [S 124](#) at the hearing.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi highlighted the importance of protecting students who were also workers because the NLRB has not consistently held that graduate assistants are workers under the NLRB. Two decades ago, a Brown University court decision denied student workers the right to organize in a union. Those rights were granted to this segment of the workforce in a Columbia University decision in 2016. Parisi informed the Committee that private sector registered nurses first organized unions in Rhode Island under the state labor relations board before the national labor relations board approved of healthcare worker organizing.

Graduate Labor Organization AFT Local 6516 President Michael Ziegler also testified in support of the bill. He talked about the value unionization had brought to PhD candidates like himself, making important economic improvements to help support families. Ziegler stressed the uncertainty of worker rights being maintained on the federal level and the importance of the RI Assembly enacting protections.

The AFL-CIO and the Building Trades supported the bill, and the Northern Rhode Island and Providence Chambers of Commerce opposed the legislation.

Captive Audience Meetings

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi issued [testimony](#) in support of legislation permitting workers to leave captive audience meetings without fear of retaliation. [S 126](#) by Senator LaMountain would prohibit retaliation if a worker left a meeting scheduled on work time if the meeting was not about the job but was about political or religious issues unrelated to work. The bill would protect workers called into meetings called by employers who want to talk workers out of forming a union. These meetings are called captive audience meetings.

Testimony from the Teamsters, AFL-CIO, Building Trades and UFCW revealed instances of anti-union meetings called by employers. Ten states have already enacted captive audience meeting legislation. The Senate Labor Committee held the bill for further study at the March 12 hearing.

State Employee Organ Donor Leave

The RIFTHP and the AFL-CIO signed up to support the creation of a new leave provision for state workers. Senator Brian Thompson introduced [S 588](#) which would permit state workers a 30-day paid leave of absence if they donated an organ to another individual. The bill was considered in the Senate Labor Committee on Wednesday March 12.

Brown University Worker Rally

The Student Labor Alliance at Brown University organized a rally in support of campus workers on March 11 on the main green. Among the speakers was RIFTHP Field Representative James Parisi, Graduate Labor Organization President (AFT Local 6516) Michael Ziegler, and Patrick Crowley of the RI AFL-CIO. The RIFTHP represents 5 different bargaining units at Brown University all under the Local 6516 umbrella. The rally was organized as several bargaining units, including the Brown Postdoc Labor Organization, have encountered resistance to a fair contract at the bargaining table.



Michael Ziegler at the Brown University Worker Rally

This Week

- The House Finance Committee will hear the Department of Education budget on Tuesday
- The Senate Finance Committee will consider the DCYF budget on Tuesday
- School air quality legislation will be considered in the House Education Committee on Tuesday
- The constitutional right to an education will be heard in the Senate Education Committee on Wednesday
- The BHDDH budget will be considered in the House Finance Committee on Thursday
- The Senate Finance Committee will hear the Department of Education Budget on Thursday

Bill Introductions

Teacher Survivor Benefit Enhancement / One-Time 2.89% COLA

([S 0249](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

([H 5472](#), Hagan McEntee, House Finance)

These bills would increase the monthly minimum benefit for a spouse, domestic partner or former spouse and grant, to eligible retirees who retired after July 1, 2012, and provide a one-time full COLA of two and eighty-nine one hundredths percent (2.89%). This act would further provide a modification reducing the federal adjusted gross income for the amount received of public pension benefits administered by the Employees Retirement System of Rhode Island.

School Social Worker Minimum Staffing

([S 0250](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

This bill would require all public schools, in grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12), to have at least one full-time certified school social worker for every two hundred fifty (250) students and provide for an appropriation by the general assembly in the amount of two million dollars (\$2,000,000) in the budget for Fiscal Year 2026 to the various school districts and municipalities to employ additional social workers.

School Vouchers

([S 0253](#), Morgan, Senate Finance)

This act would establish a new program where the per pupil funding, calculated annually by the Department of Education (RIDE), may be transferred into a newly created educational funding account (EFA) administered by the children's scholarship fund if a student qualifies, to pay for certain educational expenses such as, tuition and fees at a private school, tutoring, textbooks, computers, among other items.

Final Average Salary - 2012 Retroactivity

([S 0257](#), Felag, Senate Finance)

([H 5318](#), Edwards, House Finance)

These bills would change the teacher and state employees' retirement benefit calculations' cutoff date from July 1, 2024, to July 1, 2012, for all retirement members eligible to and who retire on or after the new July 1, 2012, cutoff date. The average compensation means the average of the highest three consecutive years of compensation, within the total service, when the average compensation was its highest.

Parents' Bill of Rights Act

([S 0284](#), Morgan, Senate Judiciary)

This bill would provide for a parents' bill of rights preventing the state or any governmental entity from infringing on the fundamental rights of parents in the upbringing of their children. The bill would spell out the rights of parents with respect to the health, education, and welfare of their minor children. Violations of the bill would result in civil, criminal and/or administrative penalties.

School Sports - Gender Determination

([S 0304](#), Morgan, Senate Judiciary)

This act would categorize women by their biological identity at birth rather than their gender identity for purpose of organized sports. A team would be categorized as males, men, or boys; females, women, or girls; or coed or mixed. If there is a dispute, a student would establish sex by presenting a signed physician's statement that shall indicate the student's sex. Additionally, this bill would create a cause of action for any student who is deprived of an athletic opportunity or subject to retaliation as a result of violations of this chapter.

Science and Technology Curricular Materials

([S 0323](#), McKenney, Senate Education)

([H 0163](#), McNamara, House Education)

These bills would provide that the commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education would direct all local education agencies to select one of the identified high-quality curricula and materials for science and technology no later than June 30, 2026.

Revenue for Rhode Islanders

([S 0329](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

([H 5473](#), Alzate, House Finance)

These bills would add create an additional Rhode Island personal income tax of three percent (3.00%) on taxable income over approximately six-hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars (\$625,000) in 2025 dollars, impacting only the top one percent (1%) in income of personal income tax filers. The existing three-bracket personal income tax structure will remain in place. In order for the new bracket to apply to income over approximately six-hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars (\$625,000) in 2025 dollars, the statute (which is written in 2011 dollars) uses the pre-

inflation amount of four-hundred and thirty thousand (\$430,000) in 2011 dollars. Each year, Rhode Island's Division of Taxation applies inflation rates to calculate the cut-offs for all income tax brackets in current year dollars. These bills would not apply retroactively to prior tax years or to taxable income from prior tax years.

Local Education Spending - Unfunded Mandates

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

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

Page Rate Increase - Court Reporters, And Electronic Court Reporters

([S 0354](#), Dimitri, Senate Judiciary)

This bill would increase the per-paper transcription fees for court reporters in court proceedings.

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.

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