

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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RIDE Budget Hearings

On Tuesday, March 18 in the House Finance Committee, the RIFTHP offered testimony on the Department of Education budget. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the increase in education funding associated with Governor McKee's proposal to increase the Student Success Factor from 40% to 43%. That proposal would provide an additional \$11 million to districts with high poverty rates. Parisi also urged an overhaul of the education aid formula with a goal of increasing the state share of education costs.

On Thursday March 20, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro offered testimony on [Budget Article 7](#), the education budget article offered by Governor Daniel McKee. In his Budget proposal, McKee proposed to improve the education funding formula and make some unhelpful changes to the mayoral academy charter school law. The Article was heard in the Senate Finance Committee at the same time the Department of Education budget was considered. In her verbal and [written testimony](#), Calabro supported the improved Student Success Factor as proposed in Article 7. She also objected to the proposals related to Mayoral Academy funding that would cost sending school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars, as well as objecting to the provision McKee offered to eliminate the requirement that a mayoral academy governing board be chaired by a Mayor.

AFT Local 2012 Testimony

Last week, AFT Local 2012 President Peg Votta testified at both House and Senate Finance Committee hearings on the RIDE budget. Local 2012 represents the professional staff at RIDE. She asked the Committees to ensure that funding is available for pay raises for her members. AFT Local 2012 has been at the bargaining table but still has not been able to secure the same pay raises bargained by other unionized state workers last July.



RIFTHP Field Representative Michael Mullane and AFT Local 2012 President in the House Finance Committee under the portrait of former Finance Committee Chair (and RIC/AFT member) Paul Sherlock

School Indoor Air Quality

On Tuesday, March 18, the RIFTHP offered verbal and [written testimony](#) in support of legislation to improve school indoor air quality. [H 5597](#) would create measurable air quality standards on issues such as temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide and particulate matter. The bill would also require professional inspections of all heating and ventilation systems every five years. The RIFTHP signed onto a [letter](#) with other organizations in support of the bill.

In his testimony, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi lauded bill sponsor Rep. Cotter for introducing the legislation. He said complaints about air quality are common with school employees, and that the enactment of measurable standards will improve air quality for students and staff in schools. The NEA/RI, the Sheet Metal Workers union, and several health advocates all testified in support of the bill.

Healthy School Meals for All Press Conference

The Healthy School Meals for All Coalition held a press conference on Tuesday March 18 in support of legislation that would provide state funding for healthy meals for all students. The RIFTHP is a member of the Coalition. To get additional information, visit the coalition website at rischoolmeals4all.com. Pictured below are bill sponsors Senator Lammis Vargas (left) and Representative Justine Caldwell (right)



Worker Rally

The Rhode Island Labor movement sponsored a rally on Saturday March 22. The theme of the rally was “Working Class Need over Billionaire Greed.” The rally was held at Alvarez High School in Providence, next door to a Tesla dealership. Among the speakers were Senator Jack Reed, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Representative Gabe Amo, and Providence Teacher Union leader Carol Pagan. About a dozen union leaders spoke out against federal budget cuts, especially those used to fund tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires.



Carol Pagan, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro, and Millie Marzan-Gallop
Lizbeth Larkin, President of the Cranston Teachers Alliance and the CTA delegation

This Week

- The public higher education budget will be heard in the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday and the House Finance Committee on Thursday
- The Senate Judiciary Committee will be voting on the Court Reporter page rate bill on Tuesday
- The Senate Education Committee will consider legislation restricting personal electronic devices in schools on Wednesday
- The House Judiciary Committee will be hearing legislation to arm campus police at CCRI and RIC on Wednesday
- The Senate Labor Committee will consider legislation about bargaining unit lists on Wednesday

Bill Introductions

Teacher Survivor Benefit Enhancement, One-time 2.89% Retiree COLA

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

([S 249](#), Sosnowski, Senate 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 bill would further provide a modification reducing federally adjusted gross income for the amount received of public pension benefits administered by the Employees Retirement System of Rhode Island.

Revenue for Rhode Islanders

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

([S 329](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

These bills would add 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.

Legacy Admissions

([H 5487](#), Morales, House Education)

This bill would ban preferential treatment to a public or private university applicant because of the student's familial relationship to a previous university attendee.

Public School Library Staffing

([H 5488](#), Kislak, House Education)

([S 178](#), Mack, Senate Education)

These bills would direct the commissioner of elementary and secondary education to ensure that every public school has a school library in a permanent and dedicated space. These bills would also direct the commissioner to ensure that every public school has a certified school librarian to manage and maintain the library.

Seizure Safe Schools

([H 5491](#), Fogarty, House Education)

([S 637](#), DiPalma, Senate Education)

These bills would require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Health to adopt policies, rules and regulations for the administration of seizure rescue medications administered via nasal route for students who have been medically identified as having epilepsy/seizure disorder.

Captive Audience Meetings

([H 5506](#), Craven, House Labor)

([S 126](#), LaMountain, Senate Labor & Gaming)

These bills would protect employees' rights in the workplace concerning political and religious matters, by creating a civil action that may provide damages and attorneys' fees.

Teacher and State Worker Retiree COLA Reinstatement

([H 5525](#), Serpa, House Finance)

This bill would exempt teachers and state employees who have been retired for more than three (3) full calendar years, from having their retirement benefit adjustment reduced based upon the funded ratio of the employees' retirement system of Rhode Island.

Scope of Bargaining - Longevity

([H 5530](#), Corvese, House Finance)

([S 743](#), Ciccone, Senate Labor & Gaming)

These bills, beginning on July 1, 2025, would allow state union employees to negotiate longevity payments in their collective bargaining agreements.

Mental and Behavioral Health Categorical Funding

([H 5532](#), House Finance)

([S 256](#), Senate Finance)

These bills would amend the current law to mandate additional state education categorical funding for the mental and behavioral health of students equal to two percent (2%) of the district's total expenditures, and would further mandate that those funds be used to hire and retain staff such as school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, behavioral specialists, and registered behavior techs (RBTs).

Licensed School Psychologists

([H 5556](#), DeSimone, House Corporations)

This bill would include licensed school psychologists under the provisions of the general laws governing the regulations of psychologists and would expand the licensing of school psychologists for independent practice.

School District Takeover Restriction

([H 5594](#), DeSimone, House Education)

This bill would require the board of regents to adopt progressive support and intervention strategies consistent with the Comprehensive Education Strategy and the principles of the "School Accountability for Learning and Teaching" (SALT) within one school district at a time.

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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