
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Rule of 90

On Tuesday, April 22, RIFTHP lobbyists James Parisi and Jeremy Sencer testified in support of the Rule of 90 legislation. [H 5198](#) by Representative Fellela would permit public employees who are at least age 60 to retire provided that their age and years of service equal 90. Current law only permits those at least age 62 to retire provided that their age and years of service equals 95. Changing the Rule of 95 to the Rule of 90 is a priority of the RIFTHP. The bill impacts teachers, state workers and municipal workers who participate in MERS.

Parisi offered [written testimony](#) in support of the bill and spoke of the bill's importance to union members. In his written testimony, Parisi compared public employees to private sector workers who can pull money from their 401(k) accounts at age 59 ½, demonstrating the reasonableness of a similar age of retirement for public sector workers who have provided at least of 30 years of service. Sencer's testimony highlighted staffing challenges that exist in public employment that would be ameliorated by the legislation.

On April 24, the RIFTHP launched an email campaign to permit members to voice their support of the legislation. After clicking on the link and entering your address, you will be presented with a sample letter to your Senator and Representative asking them to support the bill. To participate in the campaign, [click here](#).

State Education Takeover – Individual School

On Tuesday, April 22, RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified in support of legislation that limits future education state takeovers to an individual school instead of entire school districts. [H 5594](#) by Representative DeSimone was filed on behalf of the RIFTHP to prevent future state takeovers of entire school districts. RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#), citing the failure of school district takeover as a strategy for school improvement. In her letter, she wrote "This intervention has not empowered students or educators, rather it has served to further disenfranchise them. Families, teachers, and the School Board report that they have been consistently disregarded by the very leaders charged with "turning the district around." Although the intent of the Takeover was to serve as an improvement effort for our struggling schools, it has had the opposite effect by diminishing transparency, undermining trust, and diverting much needed resources away from meaningful, student-centered change."

"This is consistent with the findings of Dr. Domingo Morel, whose research shows that state takeovers disproportionately target communities of color and often erode democratic participation.

In his words, "State takeovers rarely lead to academic improvement, but they do succeed in removing the political power of Black and Latino communities." The current state takeover has exacerbated inequity rather than resolved it."

RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer and NEARI lobbyist Erich Haselhurst were the only people testifying at the House Education Committee hearing on April 22. Sencer, who spent over two decades teaching in Providence, reminded the Committee of the success the state had when it intervened in one Providence school; Hope High School. He contrasted that success with the failure of the district takeover has been in Providence for the past five years. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Court Reporter Page Rate

On Thursday, April 24, the RIFTHP testified in support of legislation to increase the rate of pay for court reporters and electronic court reporters who produce transcripts of court proceedings. Representative Rober Craven introduced [H 6159](#). The bill increases the rate by 50 cents per page for transcripts and copies of transcripts. The RIFTHP represents Court Reporters and Electronic Court Reporters who work in Family and Superior Court.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi and Rhode Island Court Reporter Alliance member Sara Czartolomna spoke at the hearing. Parisi noted that the page rate has not increased since the late 1990s, and that inflation has reduced the value of the transcript fee paid to reporters who produce transcripts. Czartolomna spoke about her experience when working as a Court Reporter in Colorado of the importance of page rate increases. Both witnesses informed the committee of the lack of qualified candidates for court reporter positions in the State Judiciary, and that increasing the page rate could make the profession more attractive to individuals thinking about careers.



Rhode Island Court Reporters Alliance Member, Sara Czartolomna

Providence School Takeover

Former Governor Gina Raimondo caused the state takeover of Providence schools in 2019. This session, Providence Mayor Smiley promoted legislation to end the state takeover in 2025.

[H 5335](#) by Representative Slater was introduced and heard in the House Education Committee on Wednesday April 23. The Mayor's office supported the bill and the Commissioner's office opposed the bill as drafted.

On April 24, 2025, Providence Teachers Union Vice Presidents Andrea Harrington (Middle Schools) and Carol Pagan (Special Populations) testified before the House Education Committee in support of H5335, legislation to end the state takeover of the Providence Public Schools under the Crowley Act. PTU leaders emphasized the urgent need to return the district to local control after years of harm under state management.

Andrea Harrington directly disputed testimony offered by Providence Public School District leadership, highlighting that eighth-grade multilingual learners are subjected to over 120 standardized tests each year — a fact that sharply contradicted claims made by Chief Academic Officer Paula Dillon. Harrington also pointed to the resignation of 979 teachers during the course of the takeover as powerful evidence of the toxic climate and culture created under state control.

Carol Pagan, a veteran Providence teacher and parent, reinforced this message, testifying that the state takeover has resulted in fractured curriculum implementation, over-testing without instructional benefit, and a systemic exclusion of teachers from key decision-making. Pagan called for an end to the takeover and a return to local control rooted in collaboration, transparency, and genuine educational improvement.

The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Additional Retirement Legislation

The April 22 agenda of the House Finance Committee was packed with retirement bills. Jeremy Sencer testified in support of two major pension improvement bills on that agenda. [H 5407](#) by Representative. Bennett would lessen the penalty for those retiring before their normal retirement date. He also offered support for [H 5762](#), a bill by Representative. Slater, which would boost the service credit earned by public employees after 20 years above the meager 1% of service credit per year of service.

The RIFTHP offered verbal and written testimony in support of legislation to increase payments to public sector retirees. In his [written testimony](#), RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered support of [H 5472](#) by Representative. McEntee to award a one-time 2.89% COLA to those retiring after July 1, 2012. That bill would also improve Teacher Survivor Benefits, a program to provide a death benefit to survivors of deceased teachers who do not participate in Social Security. This bill is being promoted by the RIAFT/R and RIPERC, the coalition of public employee union retirees.

The RIFTHP also offered support for other COLA improvement bills sponsored by Rep. Serpa ([H 5255](#) and [H 6238](#)) and Rep. O'Brien ([H 5766](#)). The bills are different alternatives to increase pension payments for retirees.

Finally, Parisi raised objections to [H 5764](#), a bill that would amortize the pension fund debt. Parisi objected to re-financing the debt on its own without any pension improvement tied to the re-amortization effort.

Scope of Bargaining - State Worker Longevity

On Tuesday, April 22, the RIFTHP joined other state unions to support legislation that would permit state employee unions to negotiate over longevity pay. [H 5530](#) by Representative Corvese would permit unions and the state to negotiate longevity in future contract negotiations. The bill is necessary because of action taken by the General Assembly in 2011 to both freeze existing longevity payments and prevent future collective bargaining agreements to contain longevity pay. Longevity pay is additional pay to employees based on years of service.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified at the hearing and submitted [written testimony](#) in support of the bill. He claimed that state agencies understand how the elimination of state worker longevity has contributed to the high vacancy rate in state government. The former statutory longevity pay system maximizes at 20% increase in pay, so elimination of state worker longevity has reduced overall long-term state worker compensation by 20%

Additional House Finance Committee Testimony

The RIFTHP also offered brief testimony on other bills during the April 22 House Finance Committee hearing. The RIFTHP offered support of legislation by Rep. Jay Edwards to award state workers up to 30 days of leave if the state worker donates an organ to someone else. [H 5020](#) was held for further study.

The RIFTHP also testified in support of [H 5322](#) by Representative O'Brien. His bill would extend the retired teacher exemption to the 90-day rule for another year. The RIFTHP testimony centered on the severe lack of substitute teachers as a rationale to extend the waiver of the 90-day rule for another year.

Personal Electronic Device Policy

The RIFTHP offered written support for legislation by Representative Casimiro that would require school districts to adopt a personal electronic device policy that bans cell phones from classrooms. [H 5598](#) was heard in the House Education Committee on April 23. RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro's letter offered full support of the bill, citing research on distracted students and heightened mental health issues associated with access to cell phones and other personal electronic devices.

In her letter, she wrote, "In the post-pandemic world, many students are still grappling with the over stimulation caused by constant digital interaction. Banning cell phones can help mitigate these issues by removing the temptation to check notifications, social media, or games during class, fostering better concentration. Research by Stanford University (2022) found that students' attentional capacity significantly improves when smartphones are removed from the classroom, as it reduces cognitive overload and increases the brain's ability to focus on academic tasks."

"The pandemic led to increased reliance on social media as a primary source of connection, which, for many students, exacerbated feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety. According to a study by the American Psychological Association (2021), adolescents who spent more time on social media during the pandemic reported higher rates of depression and anxiety, and this was linked to the negative effects of constant comparison, cyber bullying, and the pressure of digital personas."

School Libraries

On April 24, 2025, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) in support of [H 5488](#), legislation aimed at ensuring every school in Rhode Island has access to a fully staffed library. Providence Teachers Union member and school librarian Tasha White also testified before the House Education Committee, offering powerful remarks about the critical role school libraries and certified librarians play in student learning, literacy development, and equitable access to information.

White emphasized that a fully staffed library is not a luxury but an essential part of a well-rounded education, particularly for students in under-resourced communities. She explained how school libraries foster a love of reading, support curriculum goals across subjects, and provide a safe and inclusive space for all students. White warned that without certified librarians in every school, Rhode Island risks widening existing educational disparities.

May Day Action

MAY DAY

A Day of Remembrance and Resurgence

HOSTED BY AFT LOCAL 6516



A RALLY TO UNITE RHODE ISLAND'S
WORKING CLASS

JOIN LOCAL UNIONS AS WE COME
TOGETHER FOR A WORKERS' WORLD

THURS. MAY 1
2 - 4 PM
@ PROSPECT
TERRACE PARK

This Week

- The House Finance Committee will hear legislation on school meals, school social worker funding, and education funding formula improvements on Tuesday
- The Senate Labor Committee will consider legislation about charter schools being neutral in union organizing efforts on Wednesday
- The Senate Education Committee will hold a hearing on legislation creating student safety and behavioral health committees on Wednesday

Bill Introductions

State Employee Organ-Donation Leave

([S 588](#), Thompson, Senate Labor & Gaming)

([H 5020](#), Edwards, House Finance)

These bills would provide for paid leave for a state employee who donates an organ. The duration of the leave is dependent on the type of donation and notice should be provided to the employer at least thirty (30) days prior to the leave.

School Employee Termination Reporting

([S 633](#), Valverde, Senate Education)

This bill would require that the names of any noncredentialed school employees who are terminated for good and just cause, be furnished to the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The department would maintain a list of the names and the good cause for the termination. This list would not be a public document but would be available to hiring authorities of schools and school districts.

School Reporting - Cardiac Emergency

([S 635](#), McKenney, Senate Education)

This bill would require immediate notification to the principal, headmaster, executive director, or other person in charge of the educational program, or their designated agent, if that person called emergency services in response to a child whom under the care and custody of the educational program suffered a cardiac emergency. This bill would also require notification by the principal, headmaster, executive director, or other person in charge of the educational program, or their designated agent to the Department of Education within twenty-four (24) hours.

Civics - Media Literacy

([S 638](#), Euer, Senate Education)

This bill would develop and adopt a set of grade level standards in civics education for kindergarten through grade twelve (grades K-12) that teaches the history of the State of Rhode Island, Representative Government, the rights and duties of actively engaged citizenship, principals of democracy, and media literacy.

The School Libraries Act

([S 639](#), Gallo, Senate Education)

This bill 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. This bill would also direct the commissioner to ensure that every public school has a certified school librarian to manage and maintain the library.

Schools -- Pesticide Control

([S 646](#), Vargas, Senate Environment & Agriculture)

([H 5216](#), Carson, House Education)

These bills would prohibit the application of lawn care pesticides or rodenticides on the grounds of any public or private pre-school or public or private school with students in grade twelve (12) or lower, except in an emergency situation or to be used on the playing fields and playgrounds of the school as well as pre-schools and child care centers pursuant to an integrated pest management plan as developed by the Department of Environmental Management and the Department of Health and would create a task force to study health risks of PFAS in athletic fields to students who use them. These bills would also require a School Department to provide a copy of the pesticide or rodenticide application notice sent to parents and guardians to the Department of Education.

Virtual Reality Learning Platform

([S 654](#), Gallo, Senate Finance)

([H 6107](#), Biah, House Education)

These bills would establish a pilot program for a virtual reality learning platform to improve mathematic skills for grades six (6) through twelve (12) STEM education and would appropriate the sum of two million dollars (\$2,000,000) for the program.

Public Employee Service Credit Increase

([S 659](#), Britto, Senate Finance)

([H 5762](#), Slater, House Finance)

These bills would recalculate the retirement allowance related to early retirement and pension benefits for teachers, state employees and municipal employees.

CTE Student Reports

([S 662](#), McKenny, Senate Finance)

([H 5843](#), McNamara, House Education)

These bills would provide for better communication between sending and receiving districts regarding students receiving career and technical education or attending pathways programs outside of the student's home district. These bills would also adjust the costs between a sending and receiving district to educate and transport students receiving CTE or pathways education services.

State Takeover School Funding

([S 663](#), Bissailon, Senate Finance)

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

These bills 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.

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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