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# SMITH HILL REPORT



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

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June 2, 2025

## Revenue for Rhode Islanders

On Thursday, May 29, the RIFTHP joined other unions and community organizations calling on the General Assembly to enact a tax increase on the 1%, the wealthiest Rhode Islanders. [S 329](#) by Senator Murray was heard in the Senate Finance Committee. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted a [letter](#) and testified at the hearing.

Parisi told the Committee that it is understandable that the rich, several of whom testified at the hearing, did not want their taxes raised. He noted that this same group have been the beneficiaries of several significant tax cuts for the wealthy spanning the past 25 years. Taxes on high income Rhode Islander would still be significantly less than income tax rates of the 1960s and 1970s, a time when the US economy was booming and income inequality was at its lowest.

Prior to the hearing, the Revenue of Rhode Islanders Coalition held a rally outside of the statehouse in support of the tax fairness initiative. To use their website to send an email to your Senator and Representative in support of the revenue-generating campaign, [click here](#).

## School Social Worker, Bilingual Education Funding

On Tuesday, May 27, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro testified and submitted [written testimony](#) in support of important education funding initiatives. She testified in support of [S 250](#) by Senator Sosnowski. This bill would provide a \$2 million appropriation for FY 26 to support the hiring of adequate staff to meet the school social worker staffing ratio established by the bill.

In a [letter](#), she wrote “This legislation would ensure that every student receives the appropriate mental health support and educational services necessary for their success and well-being. School social workers are essential to serving students’ mental and behavioral health needs. Their expertise is critical in supporting students who face emotional, behavioral, or learning challenges. Rhode Island is facing a significant mental health crisis among its children and adolescents, with profound implications for the state's educational system. Data from Rhode Island KIDS COUNT reveals that 19% of children aged 6 to 17 have diagnosable mental health issues, and 10% experience substantial functional impairments. Alarming, only 22% of high school students reported receiving the necessary mental health support in 2021.”

Calabro also provided testimony on legislation to support bilingual and dual language education. [S 457](#) by Senator McKenney would fund staff at RIDE to promote bilingual education programs throughout the State. [S 785](#) by Senator Lammis Vargas would fund scholarship programs for undergraduates seeking a degree and certificate in bilingual or dual language education. The program also would provide scholarships for teachers seeking an additional certificate in bilingual or dual language education.

Calabro cited the growing student population of multilingual learners and the necessity of enhancing the skills and availability of appropriately certified staff to support that population.

### **Healthy School Meals**

At the same May 27 Senate Finance Committee hearing, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro offered verbal and [written testimony](#) in support of funding to provide universal school breakfast and lunch at no cost to students. [S 430](#) by Senator Vargas and [S 452](#) by Senator Acosta were supported by several witnesses and the school's healthy meals coalition.

Calabro wrote” Decades of national research corroborate the undeniable link between healthy meals and positive educational outcomes. Studies have consistently demonstrated that students who regularly consume nutritious breakfasts and lunches exhibit enhanced concentration, memory retention, and problem-solving abilities, leading to better grades and overall academic success. Proper nutrition fuels brain development and function, resulting in improved attention spans, alertness, and cognitive processing. Access to healthy school meals can contribute to a reduction in childhood obesity and related health problems, leading to fewer absences due to illness and greater engagement in school. Universal free meals can help bridge the nutritional gaps that often exist between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, fostering greater equity in both health and educational opportunities. “

“As educators, we witness firsthand the impact of hunger on our students’ ability to learn. Senate Bill 430 and Senate Bill 452 offer a powerful solution by ensuring that all children, regardless of income or zip code, have access to the nourishment they need to be successful in school. This is not simply about providing food; it is about investing in all students’ potential and creating a more supportive and equitable educational system for our children.”

### **Additional School Funding Initiates**

On May 27, Maribeth Calabro offered brief testimony on other funding initiatives in the Senate Finance Committee hearing. She voiced support for [S 190](#) by Senator Murray that would increase education funding for students in poverty by raising the student success factor in the education funding formula. The RIFTHP offered support for [S 654](#) by Senator Gallo that would fund a virtual reality education platform. The RIFTHP also offered support for [S 870](#) by Senator DiMario which would fund afterschool programs.

### **RIFTHP Priorities**

The RIFTHP is working to move our legislative priorities as the General Assembly concludes its work this month. The priorities introduced on behalf of the RIFTHP are:

**Education Takeovers – Individual Schools:** legislation by Senator Bissailon and Representative DeSimone would limit future education takeovers to individual schools, thus preventing district-wide takeovers.

**Rule of 90:** legislation by Representative Fellela and Senator Ciccone would permit those retiring at age 60 provided the member has at least 30 years of service. RIFTHP members have sent thousands of emails to support this initiative.

**Charter School Approvals – Networks:** legislation by Senator Murray and Representative Messier would limit future charter schools to individual schools, not parallel school districts

**RIDE Employee Bargaining Rights:** legislation by Representative Edwards and Senator DiPalma would confirm that RIDE employees have a right to bargain, rights threatened by recent legal actions by the Commissioner.

**Court Reporter Page Rate:** legislation by Senator Dimitri and Representative Craven would increase the page rate when court reporters and electronic court reporters create transcripts of court proceedings. The House and Senate have approved these bills.

The RIFTHP is working with the AFL CIO and other unions to support legislation to protect bargaining rights for our higher education members who are both students and workers. We are also working to support employer neutrality in charter school unionization campaigns. We are in coalition with other organizations to support Revenue for Rhode Islanders tax legislation and the Freedom to Read bill. We are working to restore the local control of the Central Falls and Providence school districts.

### **This Week**

- On Monday, the Senate Labor Committee will be voting on legislation to confirm RIDE employee bargaining rights, charter school union neutrality, restoring the ability of state employee unions to negotiate longevity pay and municipal employee binding arbitration. The RIFTHP testified in support of all these bills.
- On Monday, the Senate Health and Human Services Committee will be voting on school indoor air quality legislation supported by the RIFTHP
- On Tuesday, the Senate Finance Committee will consider legislation to extend a full year of teacher post-retirement employment for another year
- On Tuesday, the House will vote on the Senate Court Reporter Page Rate bill and on Thursday, the Senate will vote on the House Court Reporter Page Rate bill.

## Bill Introductions

### Teacher Post Retirement Employment Extension

([S 1048](#), Britto, Senate Finance)

This bill extends the sunset provision allowing retired teachers to substitute teach in excess of 90 days. The sunset provision is extended from June 20, 2025, until July 1, 2026.

### Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration

([S 1059](#), Thompson, Senate Labor & Gaming)

([H 5135](#), Bennett, House Labor)

These bills would recognize that municipal employees have the opportunity to utilize interest arbitration and would establish new factors for the arbitrators to consider. These factors would include comparisons of wages and hourly conditions of employment in similarly skilled jobs. These bills would also grant the arbitrators power to render an award over all negotiated matters, including the expenditure of money.

### Wealth Tax

([H 6290](#), Potter, House Finance)

([S 779](#), Mack, Senate Finance)

These bills would impose a wealth tax on Rhode Island individuals and entities at a rate of one percent (1%) of worldwide wealth.

### High-Cost Special Education Fund

([H 6325](#), Cortvriend, House Finance)

This bill would establish a new high-cost special education fund to pool resources and generate income to support excess costs associated with providing service to special education students.

## 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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