

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

February 18, 2025

Article 7 – Education Aid

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro offered [written testimony](#) in support of one aspect of Governor McKees education budget article while opposing two other elements of the proposal. [Article 7](#) was heard in the House Finance Committee on February 12. In her letter, Calabro lauded the proposal to increase education funding for students living in poverty. McKee has proposed increasing the Student Success Factor from 40% of costs to 43% of cost to supplement funding for students in poverty. The proposal would increase state education funding by an additional **\$10.9** million in FY 26.

Calabro opposed two proposals in Article 7 that would cost school districts money at the expense of mayoral academies and skew mayoral academy governance. Article 7 proposes to limit the amount of local spending saved on mayoral academy tuition to 14%, a potential cost increase in places like Woonsocket which have low per pupil spending and a growing mayoral academy tuition bill.

Article 7 would also let mayoral academies be run without a Mayor leading the school. The RIFTHP asked the Assembly to give every community the opportunity to leave a mayoral academy if there are no mayors who want to chair the mayoral academy board of trustees.

Definition of Employee – Student Workers

[H 5187](#) by House Labor Committee Chair Arthur Corvese is a bill that expands the definition of "employee" and also modifies how the state's Labor Relations Board operates and aids in enforcement of the Board's orders. One aspect of the bill important to the RIFTHP is the provision that ensures that the State Labor Relations Board covers workers not covered by the National Labor Relations Board. The bill specifies that the definition of employee includes students who are also workers, such as graduate assistants and research assistants.

[H 5187](#) was heard in the House Labor Committee on Wednesday, February 12. RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi offered verbal and [written](#) testimony in support of the bill. Parisi urged passage of the bill as a means to ensure union protection for a group of workers whose coverage by federal labor law has not been consistently supported. The RIFTHP is concerned that future NLRB

appointee by our new President may not support student workers and their right to organize under the NLRB.

Also testifying and providing a [letter of support](#) in support of the bill was Michael Ziegler, President of AFT Local 6516, the Graduate Labor Organization at Brown University. GLO represents 5 different bargaining units, four of which are student workers protected by the bill. Anna Yu, who leads the Community Coordinators unit of GLO also testified at the hearings. Pat Crowley, RI AFL-CIO President testified in support of the bill as did labor lawyers Liz Wiens and Carly Iafate. The Providence Chamber of Commerce opposed the bill.



GLO members at the Statehouse in support of their union leaders testifying on 2/12/2025.

Warwick Public Schools Budget Commission

Darlene Netcoh, President of the Warwick Teachers Union had testified against the creation of a Warwick Public Schools Budget Commission in the House Education Committee on February 6. The WTU was able to secure protections for their contract, teacher and school staff bargaining rights, protect the construction of two new high schools, and prevent the Budget Commission from firing workers. Despite garnering these protections, the WTU opposed the bill because it is premature as the school committee budget deficit was first revealed in December and the Warwick School Committee is working to reduce the deficit under current statutory processes. The WTU also voiced concern that it is a bad precedent for other communities in Rhode Island.

The bill has the support of Speaker Shekarchi and House Education Committee Chair Rep. McNamara. On Wednesday, February 12, the House Education Committee unanimously voted to approve an amended version of the bill and send the bill to the full House for consideration. [H 5252A](#) will be considered by the House after the break. The Senate version was recently introduced and will also be considered after the break.

This Week

- The House and Senate are not meeting this week as they are in recess during the February and April school vacation weeks. Hearings will recommence on the week of February 24.

Bill Introductions

\$30,000,000 - Safety and Security Improvements

([S 105](#), Rogers, Senate Finance)

This bill would authorize the appropriation of the sum of \$100,000 to each public school in Rhode Island for school safety and security improvements.

Special Education Categorical Funding - 3 Times Cost

([S 109](#), Ujjifusa, Senate Finance)

This bill would amend the calculation of state funding provided to local education agencies for special education services. The act would revise the calculation of extraordinary special education costs in fiscal years 2027 and 2028 and would also provide additional funds for excess costs for special education students who move into a district after a district has approved its fiscal year budget.

School Vouchers

([S 112](#), de la Cruz, Senate Finance)

This bill would provide parents of kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) students in Rhode Island with an opportunity to enroll their child in an educational program of their choosing, either via open enrollment in a traditional public school in their own district or any other public school district, or by receiving a scholarship, with designated public monies to follow the student to a participating private school or private curriculum program selected by the parent. The program combines aspects of what are sometimes referred to as "school choice" and "school voucher" programs. The program would begin August 1, 2025.

Captive Audience Meetings

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

This bill would protect the rights of employees in the workplace relating to free speech, assembly, and religion, as well as attendance at employer-sponsored meetings regarding political or religious matters. Employees so aggrieved by discipline or discharge by the employer would have the right to bring a civil action against the employer seeking equitable relief and/or compensatory damages including attorneys' fees and costs.

Public Employee Bargaining Unit Lists

([S 127](#), Ciccone, Senate Labor)

This bill would require the employers of unionized public school teachers, municipal employees and state employees, to provide the union, at least once every one hundred twenty (120) days, a list of all their employees in their union, as well as their personal and demographic information, which shall be kept confidential by the employer and the employee organization.

Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Act

([S 176](#), DiMario, Senate Education)

This bill would establish the Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Act. This bill would enable students with disabilities who are ages eighteen (18) through twenty-one (21) years, and in some cases to age twenty-two (22) years, to audit and otherwise attend state colleges and universities using the student's foundation education aid.

Right to an Adequate Education

([S 177](#), Acosta, Senate Education)

This amendment 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.

Public School Library Staffing

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

This bill would require every public school in Rhode Island to have a school library or library media center in a permanent and dedicated space available to students in grades K-12 with a librarian available to permit access to the library for students before, during and after school hours.

September 11 Classroom Moment of Silence

([S 179](#), Raptakis, Senate Education)

([H 5251](#), Read, House Education)

These bills would allow teachers in all grades to provide the opportunity for students to observe a brief moment of silence on every September 11.

Higher Education Post Retirement Employment - Eligibility

([S 184](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

This bill would expand the post-retirement positions that any retired member in the state retirement system could have at a state college or university, to include positions outside of teaching, but would maintain the same cap on the amount of money that person could be paid for part-time work.

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.

SUBSCRIBE



Register to receive the Smith Hill Report directly, [click here](#).