

The

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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

February 24, 2025

## Federal Education Spending

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro spoke at a press conference on Monday, February 17, 2025, joining the rest of Rhode Island's education community to oppose efforts to defund and eliminate the US Department of Education. The press conference featured Senator Reed, Congressman Whitehouse, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro, NEA/RI Executive Director Mary Barden, Paige Parks from Kids Count, and Postsecondary Commissioner Shannon Gilkey.

Maribeth Calabro called the dismantling of the Department of Education a "*direct threat to the principles of equity, innovation and national progress.*" She stressed the department's essential role in ensuring equal access to quality education for all students.

Calabro further warned that the proposed cuts would increase inequities and teacher quality.

*"Without federal oversight, students in marginalized communities would face even greater disparities in resources, teacher quality and educational opportunities,"* she said. Calabro also addressed the threat posed to higher education funding, noting that Pell Grants are crucial to many students' ability to attend college.

The AFT prepared a one-page summary of federal education spending in Rhode Island which can be viewed [here](#).

## This Week

- The Senate Judiciary Committee will hear legislation to increase the page rate for transcripts prepared by Court Reporters and Electronic Court Reporters on Tuesday
- On Tuesday, the House Education Committee will consider a bill creating Student Safety and Behavioral Health Committees
- The House will vote on the creation of a Warwick Budget Commission

## **Bill Introductions**

### **Threats Against School Employees - Felony**

([H 5262](#), Noret, House Judiciary)

This bill would add school superintendents, central office officials, school principals, and all other school employees, to the definition of a “public official” for purposes of the criminal prohibition against making threats to public officials.

### **Public Employee Bargaining Unit Lists**

([H 5266](#), Corvese, House Labor)

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

These bills 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.

### **Teachers Retirement - Leave of Absence**

([H 5279](#), Donovan, House Finance)

This bill would amend the current law on teachers’ creditable service so that a teacher who takes an unpaid parental or medical leave during the year would be given credit for a year of service for that school year if they served a minimum of one-hundred thirty-five school days.

### **Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities Act**

([H 5280](#), Cortvriend, House Finance)

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.

### **Special Education Categorical Funding 3 Times**

([H 5282](#), Donovan, House Finance)

This bill would amend the calculation of state funding provided to local education agencies for special education services. The bill 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.

**2% Higher Education Endowment Tax**  
**([H 5285](#), Morales, House Finance)**

This bill would authorize a host city or town to impose a two percent (2%) tax on the endowment of a private institution of higher education that is in excess of one billion dollars (\$1,000,000,000), to be used only for the host public school district.

**BEP CTE Student Data Collection**  
**([H 5292](#), Fellela, House Education)**

This bill would require that the basic education program data collection information for students that attend career and technical education schools be charged to the receiving school district and not the sending school district.

**3 Year Final Average Salary - Retroactivity**  
**([H 5318](#), Edwards, House Finance)**

This bill 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 (3) consecutive years of compensation, within the total service, when the average compensation was its highest.

**Teacher Post Retirement Employment - 1 Year Extension**  
**([H 5322](#), O'Brien, House 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.

**Providence Schools - Local Control - July 1, 2025**  
**([H 5335](#), Slater, House Education)**

This bill would nullify the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's recommendation that the turnaround plan for Providence Public Schools be continued.

**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).

---

**SUBSCRIBE**



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