

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

March 3, 2025

March 4 Day of Action

The RIFTHP and its locals are participating in a day of action organized by the AFT in support of public education funding now under direct threat in Washington, DC. Educators are encouraged to wear red on Tuesday as we march forth in opposition to the dismantling of the US Department of Education and oppose the dramatic federal funding cuts now being considered by Congress and the White House.



Student Safety and Behavioral Health Committees

On Tuesday, February 25, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro testified in support of legislation that would create committees in every school district to focus on school safety and behavioral health. The legislation, initiated by the NEA/RI, was sponsored by Rep, Megan Cotter. [H 5165](#) was heard in the House Education Committee. The Student Safety and Behavioral Health Committees would assess local needs and develop programs to meet these needs. The committees would include teachers and other stakeholders.

President Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) containing data in support of the legislation. Her letter highlighted the number of students with concerns about their safety and well-being compiled by Kids Count. Calabro cited that 12% of high school students reported not attending school due to safety concerns. In a 2021 report, only one in five high school students reported receiving the mental health they need.

Court Reporter/Electronic Court Reporter Page Rate

The Senate Judiciary held a hearing on legislation that would increase the rate of pay for court reporters and electronic court reporters who produce transcripts in the state judiciary. The Rhode Island Court Reporters Alliance (RICRA), AFT Local 4829 represents Court Reporters (formerly known as stenographers) and Electronic Court Reporters working in Family and Superior Court. [S 354](#) by freshman Senator Andrew Dimitri could increase the pay by 50 cents per page.

RIFTHP Field Representative and Lobbyist James Parisi and RICRA President Cindy Tangney both testified in support of the bill. Parisi informed the committee that the rate was last increased in the late 1990s, and inflation has increased while the rate of pay has remained stagnant. Parisi also argued that the Judiciary has had challenges in finding Court Reporters, and raising the compensation they receive for producing transcripts could help make the profession more attractive. Cindy Tangney spoke of the importance of the bill and confirmed that higher rates are paid in federal court and a few neighboring states.



*RIFTHP Field Rep., James Parisi, RIFTHP President, Maribeth Calabro,
RI Court Reporters, Cindy Tangney*

Freedom to Read Coalition Formed

The RIFTHP has joined a coalition to support Freedom to Read. The phrase refers to protecting public librarians from unfair prosecution triggered by complaints about books and materials they procure. The coalition also organized to oppose efforts to ban books and materials that are appropriate for our public libraries. The coalition will hold a press conference on Thursday, March 6.

All-Charter School Districts

The RIFTHP submitted [written testimony](#) in opposition to legislation filed by Representative Place. [H 5337](#) was considered in the House Education Committee on February 25. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi penned a letter opposing the bill. He objected to the legislation's goal of eliminating public schools governed by elected school committees and replacing them entirely with publicly funded privately operated charter schools. Parisi cited the lack of accountability to the community should the state adopt the plan offered by Rep. Place. In introducing his bill, he cited precedent in New Orleans, which created an all-charter district after Hurricane Katrina. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

This Week

- Tuesday, March 4 - Day of Action to Protect our Students
- Revenue for Rhode Islanders will hold a seminar and press conference on Tuesday, March 4 encouraging consideration of raising taxes on the richest 1% of Rhode Islanders
- The Senate Finance Committee will hear testimony on a Warwick Public Schools Budget Commission on Tuesday
- Freedom to Read coalition will announce its legislative goals on Thursday, March 6

Bill Introductions

Student Success Factor Increase

([S 0190](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

This bill would ensure that in local educational agencies when over forty-five percent (45%) of the children have a family income that is at or below one hundred eighty-five percent (185%) of federal poverty guidelines then the student success factor will be fifty percent (50%) by the core instruction per-pupil amount.

Training School Age of Entry

([S 0205](#), Acosta, Senate Judiciary)

([H 5346](#), Stewart, House Judiciary)

These bills would prohibit the family court from detaining any juvenile or committing any juvenile, under the age of twelve (12) years, to the training school, for any offense other than murder, first degree sexual assault, or an attempt to commit such offenses, and the court determines that there is no other reasonable placement to ensure the safety of the juvenile and the general public.

Elementary Student Suspension Restrictions

([S 0230](#), Quezada, Senate Education)

This bill would expand and fine tune the law on the right to a safe school. It would authorize the school administration to issue an out-of-school suspension to students in grade six (6) or above not only if they are disruptive, but also if they are a threat to the safety of students, teachers, or administrators; or found guilty of violating school regulations involving alcohol, illegal drugs or controlled substances, or weapons. This bill would also provide that where students are in preschool through grade five (5), the school administration may issue an out-of-school suspension but only after a consultation with a school psychologist or other mental health professional.

Student Computer Device Privacy

([S 0232](#), Valverde, Senate Education)

([H 5176](#), House Innovation, Internet, & Technology)

These bills would prohibit an educational institution or school district from accessing any audio or video recording, transmitting or recording function on a student's institutional or personal device or using location data for tracking a student's institutional device or personal device, or allow a third party to do so, except in limited circumstances.

State Academic Standards Repeal

([S 0233](#), Morgan, Senate Education)

This bill would repeal in their entirety sections 16-22-30, 16-22-31, 16-22-32 and 16-22-33, all of which relate to the establishment of statewide academic standards in mathematics, English language arts, science and technology, history, social studies, world languages and the arts and their implementation into the curriculum of all public schools

High School Student Transition Plans - 504 Plans

([S 0234](#), Quezada, Senate Education)

This bill would require transition planning for high school students with disabilities, who have a "504" plan, like the transition planning required for high school students with disabilities, who have an individualized education program (IEP).

Student Safety and Behavioral Health Committees

([S 0235](#), Appollonio, Senate Education)

([H 5165](#), Cotter, House Education)

These bills would require the school board or committees of cities and towns to establish a safety and behavioral health committee (SSBHC). These bills would also lay out the representation requirements and committee responsibilities to ensure a stable learning environment for all students.

Religion -- Rights of Students Act

([S 0237](#), Morgan, Senate Education)

This bill would create the "Rights of Students Act" to provide protection for students and parents against discrimination on the basis of a religious viewpoint or religious expression. This bill would also allow students to pray or engage in religious activities before, during or after school as well as to wear clothing, jewelry or accessories that display religious messages or symbols. Additionally, the act would create a complaint process for a student or parent seeking to file legal action to enforce this bill.

The Freedom to Read Act

([S 0238](#), McKenney, Senate Education)

This bill would promote free expression and free access of information by prohibiting the censorship of library materials. This bill would require the creation of a model policy related to library material within a public library and school library.

Warwick Public Schools Budget Commission

([S 0242](#), McKenney, Senate Finance)

([H 5252A](#), McNamara, House Education)

These bills would create a budget commission to oversee the Warwick schools district until such time as the fiscal year 2025 - 2026 Warwick school budget is approved as recommended by the mayor and approved by the city council, and the budget commission adopts a deficit reduction plan approved by the auditor general.

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](#).