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# SMITH HILL REPORT



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

April 22, 2024

## Spring Recess

The Rhode Island General Assembly did not meet this past week in observance of the spring break. There were no committee hearings scheduled during the recess. There are still a significant number of bills, especially education funding and pension-related legislation, which have not had a scheduled hearing yet.

## Pension Improvement Bill Filed

Senator Felag and Representative Edwards have submitted legislation to improve teacher, state worker and municipal employee pensions by changing the salary used to calculate pension benefits. Instead of using a five-year average of highest consecutive years of salary, the legislation would direct that an average of the three highest consecutive years be used to calculate pension benefits. The legislation would increase pension benefits and would impact those retiring on or after July 1, 2024. [S 2979](#) has been referred to the Senate Finance Committee and [H 8149](#) has been referred to the House Finance Committee. H 8149 was not drafted correctly and will need to be amended to include revisions to the teacher statute to mirror the changes in state and municipal worker statutes.

## Additional Legislative Activity

The RIFTHP signaled support for several legislative initiatives in recent weeks, including support for:

**State Worker Organ Donation Leave** - [H 8009](#) by Representative Edwards would provide state workers with up to 30 days of paid leave when they donate an organ.

**School Libraries Act** – [S 2520](#) by Senator Mack would enact specific staffing provisions in state law in support of school library programs.

**Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act** – [S 2917](#) by Senator Cano and [H 7514](#) by Representative Felix would codify bilingual and dual language programs in education law and provide funding for staff to support the program.

## **Bills on the Move**

The following bills have both passed the Committee that heard the bill and the full House chamber. Bills must pass both chambers in concurrence (in identical form) before being sent to the Governor for signature.

### **Emergency Teaching Certificate Duration**

[H 7725-A](#), which was introduced by Representative O'Brien, passed the House on 4/9/2024, with a vote of 70 yeas, 0 nays, and 5 members not voting.

This bill would allow emergency preliminary certificates for teaching to be issued for up to a total of five (5) school years.

### **Parental Diabetes Information Material**

[H 7613](#), which was introduced by Representative Donovan, passed House on 4/9/2024, with a vote of 68 yeas, 0 nays, and 7 members not voting.

This bill would require RIDE to develop type diabetes informational materials for the parents and guardians of students that will be posted publicly on RIDE's website.

### **Private Pre-K School Deregulation**

[H 7780](#), which was introduced by Representative Donovan, passed the House on 4/9/2024, with a vote of 67 yeas, 0 nays, and 8 members not voting.

This bill would remove private schools from the provisions of the general laws relating to educational services to very young children.

### **Physical Education - Student IEP**

[H 7561](#), which was introduced by Representative Casimiro, passed the House on 4/11/2024, with a vote of 68 yeas, 0 nays, 7 members not voting.

This bill would enable cities and towns to enact enabling legislation authorizing a partner program to assist students with an IEP for specially designed physical education classes.

### **ABLE Account Program Information**

[H 7612](#), which was introduced by Representative Cortivriend, passed the House on 4/11/2024, with a vote of 68 yeas, 0 nays, and 7 members not voting.

This bill would require school districts to provide the parent or guardian of a student with an individualized education program (IEP) with information concerning the achieving a better life experience (ABLE) account program benefits and the program application process.

## Bill Introductions

### **ERSRI Definition - Domestic Partner**

([H 7915](#), Noret, House Finance)

This bill would amend the definition of "domestic partner" for purposes of the retirement system - contributions and benefits chapter.

### **Municipal Post Retirement Employment - 90 Days**

([H 7917](#), Roberts, House Finance)

([S 2010](#), Rogers, Senate Finance)

These bills would increase the number of days a retired municipal employee could work in a calendar year without interruption of pension benefits to ninety (90) days.

### **2% Public Employee Retiree Pension Adjustment, Tax Deduction**

([H 7993](#), McEntee, House Finance)

([S 2580](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

These bills would allow for a one-time two percent (2%) supplemental cost of living adjustment for plan year 2025 to the public pension benefits administered by the Employees Retirement System of Rhode Island (ERSRI) and allow for those benefits to be deducted from the taxpayer's adjusted gross income.

### **State Employees -- Organ-Donation Leave Act**

([H 8009](#), Edwards, House State Government & Elections)

This bill 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 Committee Elections - Age 16**

([H 8046](#), Felix, House State Government & Elections)

([S 2895](#), Mack, Senate Judiciary)

These bills would allow citizens of a city or town who are at least sixteen (16) years of age to register to vote and to vote in school committee elections in municipalities where school committees are elected entities.

### **Funding for Out-Of-School Time Programs**

([H 8047](#), Shallcross Smith, House Finance)

([S 2864](#), Cano, Senate Finance)

These bills would provide four million dollars (\$4,000,000) to support comprehensive and effective afterschool, school vacation, summer learning and workforce development programs for students in grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12) and require an annual report to the General Assembly and the Governor on the status and progress of the programs.

**Student Loan Repayment Program**

([H 8048](#), Shallcross Smith, House Finance)

([S 2591](#), DiMario, Senate Finance)

These bills would create the Rhode Island Student Loan repayment program which would allow eligible individuals who have unpaid student loans to receive relief if the individual is employed as a licensed clinical social worker or social caseworker or child protective investigator in any public elementary school in this state, has been full-time in this state in such employment for two (2) years and is enrolled in the Federal Student Aid, Saving on a Valuable Education program.

**Licensed School Psychologists**

([H 8070](#), DeSimone, House Corporations)

([S 2871](#), Lombardi, Senate Health & Human Services)

These bills would include licensed school psychologists under the provisions of the general laws governing the regulations of psychologists and would expand the licensing of school psychologists for independent practice.

**School Emergency Drills Act**

([H 8102](#), Boylan, House Education)

([S 2950](#), Cano, Senate Education)

These bills would revise the number, timing, and procedures to be followed when schools' grades K through twelve implement fire drills, evacuation drills, and crisis response drills, designed to protect the health and safety of students. This act would also require the integration of trauma-informed practices in preparing and conducting those drills.

**School Sports - Skateboarding**

([H 8104](#), Cotter, House Education)

This bill would authorize the sport of skateboarding to be a youth sports program that is part of Rhode Island Interscholastic League Competition.

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### 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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