

May 15, 2023

Adjunct Medical Insurance

On Thursday, May 18, the Senate Finance Committee heard [S 211](#) by Senator Miller to provide medical insurance to adjunct faculty employed by Rhode Island's three public higher education institutions. Senator Miller has championed this bill in the past, and it unanimously passed the Senate but died in the House of Representatives last year.

RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill. The RIFTHP joined with the NEA/RI and AFSCME Council 94 and submitted written testimony ([click here](#)) in support of the legislation. Parisi thanked the Senate for its past support and urged passage of the bill again this year. He noted that adjunct faculty earn poor wages, and that without their work the colleges and university could not function. He testified that adjunct faculty are about the only segment of the state workforce that did not afford the opportunity to get medical insurance through the State plan. He commented that the RIFTHP supports any necessary allocation of funding to higher education institutions.

Universal School Breakfast and Lunch

On Wednesday, May 10, the Senate Education Committee passed two bills related to school meals. [S 68](#) by Senator Cano and [S 71](#) by Senator Acosta were heard and approved by the Committee. S 68 would provide universal free school lunch for all Rhode Island schoolchildren. S 71 would provide both universal free breakfast and lunch to students. The Committee Chair commented that in passing both bills, the Senate will be sending a message that this is an important issue.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn provided a [letter of support](#) and testified at the hearing. He emphasized the importance of good nutrition for students' success. He supported the provision of the bill that requires meals that meet healthy guidelines. He commented on how much money teachers spend to support students who do not have lunch and lack money to buy lunch. Flynn supported both bills and thanked the Senators for their support of students. The NEA/RI, Kids Count, the Interfaith Coalition, and the Economic Progress Institute testified in support of the bills. Both bills passed on a 5-0 vote, with Senators Cano, Quezada, Mack, McKenney and Zurier all voting in the affirmative. The bills will be considered on the Senate floor on Tuesday.

Income Tax Fairness

On Tuesday, May 8, the RIFTHP testified in support of [H 6148](#) by Representative Alzate that would raise taxes on income over \$557,000 per year, impacting the top 1% of earners. The bill was heard in the House Finance Committee. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified and provided a [letter](#) of support for the

legislation. Passage of the legislation would provide approximately \$170 million additional state revenue every year. The legislation directs the Assembly to spend the additional money on K-12 education, higher education, roads and bridges, public transportation, and childcare.

In his testimony, Parisi informed the Committee that there are considerable funding needs in education requiring additional state resources. While the State has borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars for school construction and renovation, there remains the need for the State to pay down that debt. He also cited other priorities needing funding that would be made possible with the legislation. Parisi emphasized that the bill would create a fairer tax system, since the uber-wealthy pay less in taxes as a percent of income than working class Rhode Islanders. The bill was supported by the Economic Progress Institute, SEIU, Kids Count, and other advocates. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Captive Audience Meetings

On Wednesday, May 10, the RIFTHP signed up to support (without testimony) [S 447](#) by Senator LaMountain. The bill would prohibit employers from requiring employees to attend meetings on work time related to political or religious matters unrelated to their employment. The bill would also prohibit captive audience meetings. Captive audience meetings are mandatory meetings employers and their union-busting consultants often utilize to pressure workers to vote no during a union organizing campaign. The Teamsters and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) both testified for the bill. The AFL-CIO also signed up to support the bill. The ACLU raised some concerns with the legislation, raising concern about the bill's provisions related to free speech. The ACLU indicated they would not object to a narrowly-crafted bill that would prohibit captive audience meetings without impacting other speech. The Senate Labor Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration

On Thursday, May 11, the Senate approved legislation that would create a system of binding arbitration for municipal employees. The RIFTHP had testified in support of the bill the previous week. The vote was 29 to 5 ([click here](#)). Voting No were Senators de la Cruz, Morgan, Paolino, Rogers and Zurier. Senator DeLuca recused from voting.

Rhode Island municipal employee bargaining law has a provision for binding arbitration, but the arbitrator decision is not binding on monetary issues. [S 426](#) by Senator Lawson would extend the existing arbitration law to include all issues, including wages and benefits. The bill will be referred to the House of Representatives.

Wage Theft and Misclassification

The AFL-CIO has several legislative priorities, including legislation to make wage theft and misclassification of workers a felony. This is a particular problem in the service and construction industries. Legislation by Representative Robert Craven ([H 5902](#)) to address this issue was heard in the House Judiciary Committee on May 11. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn authored a [letter](#) in support of the legislation.

In his letter, Flynn noted that the practice targets some of our most vulnerable workers. A small minority of employers prey on vulnerable employees, cheating them out of wages. Flynn stated that educators observe difficulties students, and their families face when parents struggle to provide basic housing and food for their families. The bill was held for further study.

Support the Hope Scholarship at Rhode Island College

A legislative priority of the RIFTHP is to create a two-year scholarship for students at Rhode Island College. The program is similar to the RI Promise scholarship program at CCRI. The RIC AFT Faculty Union is organizing an email campaign to support the legislation and funding for a pilot program at RIC.

To get more information on the program, [click here](#).

To support the legislation, email your Senator and Representative by using the following link: [click here](#).

Bill Introductions

Duration of State School Takeover

([S 761](#), Goodwin, Senate Education)

This bill would provide commencing in fiscal year 2023, that reconstitution and control of a school or district by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would not exceed two (2) years except for a possible six (6) month extension when substantial progress is achieved. Any reconstitution in effect at the time of passage would conclude no later than June 30, 2024.

Charter School Expenditure Cap

([S 762](#), Goodwin, Senate Education)

This bill would provide limitations and prescribe caps on a district's total charter school expenses. The bill would provide that a school district's budget for Charter Schools is not to exceed nine percent (9%) of the school district's budget unless the school district is under state control and then the school district's budget for charter schools would not exceed twenty-three percent (23%).

Student Behavioral Health Screening

([S 764](#), Cano, Senate Education)

This bill would require all public schools to screen all enrolled students for behavioral health concerns by June 30, 2024. Thereafter, all public schools would be required to conduct behavioral health screenings of students in the third grade, eighth grade, and students who enroll from a district outside of the state.

Teacher Preparation Programs - Cultural Competence Training

([S 765](#), Cano, Senate Education)

This bill would require all educator preparation programs to include lessons on cultural competency and how teachers shall meet the instructional needs of multilingual learners. This bill would take effect upon passage.

American Rescue Plan Fiscal Report

([S 767](#), Zurier, Senate Education)

([H 6128](#), Edwards, House Education)

These bills would require every school district, local education agency, city and town to report each fiscal year relating to funding, administrative and program information from the American Rescue plan, elementary and secondary school emergency relief, and state and local recovery funds. The school district reports would be published on the Department of Education website and city and town reports on the division of municipal finance website.

DCYF Educational Advocate Team

([S 768](#), DiPalma, Senate Education)

([H 5458](#), Casimiro, House Health & Human Services)

These bills would require that each child under the supervision of the department of children, youth and families be provided a team of educational advocates which would be required to attend meetings on a regular basis to ensure the child's educational planning, progress and success.

\$738,088 - Rhode Island College - HSI Programs

([S 774](#), Cano, Senate Finance)

([H 6243](#), Alzate, House Finance)

These resolutions would authorize the appropriation of the sum of \$738,088 to Rhode Island College to fund Rhode Island College Hispanic Serving Institution status and student support.

Duty to Report - Felony

([S 814](#), DiPalma, Senate Judiciary)

([S 5358](#), Casimiro, House Judiciary)

These bills would require that any coach, teacher, school administrator, or person in a position of authority who knowingly fails to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect, sexual assault or battery involving a child or who knowingly fails to perform any other act required by law for the protection or safety of a child would be guilty of a felony, and upon conviction, would be subject to a fine of not less the five thousand dollars (\$5,000), nor more than ten thousand dollars (\$10,000), or to imprisonment for not more than five (5) years, or both.

District Action Plans

([S 833](#), Pearson, Senate Education)

([H 6272](#), McNamara, House Education)

These bills would extend the due date for the district action plan each and every year from September 1 to December 1, and further require that there are no fewer than five (5) school district education reviews annually beginning in academic year 2024-2025.

Taxation of Higher Education Institutions

([S 859](#), Mack, Senate Finance)

([H 5603](#), Morales, House Municipal)

These bills would allow the host city or town to impose a two percent (2%) tax on the endowment of a private institution of higher education, to be used only for the host's public school district.

FOLLOW US

The RIFTHP has a twitter account for legislative issues. If you are on twitter, follow us @[RIFTHPL](#)

SIGN UP
NOW!



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