
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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House Education Committee Hearing Highlights

On Wednesday March 9, the House Education Committee took testimony on a number of bills, including three bills that generated union testimony. Providence Teacher's Union Vice President Jeremy Spencer testified in support of [H 7377](#), a bill by Rep. Ramon Perez, that would create an elected school committee for Providence. The bill requires that the voters approve the measure in a future election. Providence and Central Falls are the only two school districts in Rhode Island without an elected school committee. Prior to the state takeover, Providence was run by a school board appointed by the Mayor. The PTU, which has called for an end of the state takeover of the District, hopes to see a community-supported board to oversee Providence schools once the state gives the schools back to the community. The RIFTHP also communicated support for the legislation.

At the House Education Committee hearing, the RIFTHP provided written testimony in support of a Teacher's Bill of Rights. The bill, [H 7538](#) by Representative O'Brien, would create a bill of rights for teachers that contain some specific requirements. Frank Flynn's letter in support of the legislation ([click here](#)) highlighted some of the more important features of the bill.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn also provided written testimony ([click here](#)) in opposition to [H 7479](#) by Representative Quattrocchi. His bill would require teacher training to comply with the Right to Read Act to specifically include Orton-Gillingham training. The bill would also prohibit reasonable exemptions to the training requirement. The RIFTHP objected to specifying one particular program for statewide training of scientific reading instruction. H 7479 and the other bills were all held for further study by the Education Committee.

Senate Hearing Highlights

On Wednesday March 9, 2022, the Senate Education Committee held its first meeting. The Committee took testimony on [S 2033](#) by Senator Roger Picard. His bill would permit up to five school days per year to be held virtually in case of inclement weather or other emergent situations. The RIFTHP offered written testimony in support of the legislation. In his letter ([click here](#)), RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered support for the bill but asked for an amendment. He

requested that the bill be amended to ensure that hourly employees not lose pay if the school day is held virtually. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

On Thursday March 10, the Senate Health and Human Services Committee took testimony on legislation by Committee Chair Josh Miller ([S 2198](#)) that would dedicate a portion of fines related to marijuana offenses to be used for drug prevention programs in schools. The RIFTHP represents 60 drug prevention counselors employed by the Rhode Island Student Assistance Services program working in 70 secondary schools. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi provided written testimony in support of the bill ([click here](#)). While the RIFTHP would prefer dedicated state funding for these services that rely on federal grants, the RIFTHP would support any reasonable means to generate funding for important prevention programs. The legislature is expected to seriously consider the legalization of marijuana this session. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Commissioner of Education Appointments

This past week, the House State Government and Elections Committee took testimony on legislation by Representative O'Brien to require the Senate to provide advice and consent through legislative action on the appointment of future K-12 and Postsecondary Commissioners of Education. The legislation mirrors Senate legislation considered a few weeks earlier. The RIFTHP provided written testimony ([click here](#)) in support of [H 7586](#). The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Bill Introductions

Regulation of Municipal Government Lobbying

([H 7219](#), *Filippi, House State Government & Elections*)

([S 2512](#), *Paolino, Senate Judiciary*)

These acts would expand the lobbying reform act to apply to persons who lobby municipal government executives and legislative bodies, as well as local fire districts.

Taxation of Public Employee Pensions

([H 7238](#), *McNamara, House Finance*)

This act provides that individuals who do not qualify for social security benefits and who receive pension income may exclude the pension income from taxation under the same circumstances that social security income is excluded from taxation. Alternatively, up to fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) in pension income will be excluded from taxation.

Fractional COLA for Retirees

([H 7239](#), *McEntee, House Finance*)

([S 2456](#), *Sosnowski, Senate Finance*)

These acts would provide that effective January 1, 2023, the current COLA suspension schedule would be replaced with a fractional annual COLA of twenty-five percent (25%) of the COLA declared for that plan year, as it pertains to retired teachers, state and municipal employees.

Multi-state Nurse Licensure

([H 7268](#), Kennedy, House Corporations)

([S 2472](#), Miller, Senate Health & Human Services)

These acts would amend the interstate nurse licensure compact and would adopt an enhanced and more comprehensive version of the compact, to allow nurses to hold a multi-state license which would allow them to practice across state lines without having to obtain multiple licenses.

Curriculum - Asian American History

([H 7272](#), Fenton-Fung, House Education)

This act would require all public elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island to provide at least one unit of instruction on Asian American History and culture.

Listing of Terminated Teachers

([H 7274](#), McNamara, House Education)

This act would require a school committee to submit the identity of any teacher terminated for cause to the Rhode Island Department of Education. The act would also require the department to allow access to the list by the hiring authority of any private, parochial, charter or public school. The list of terminated teachers would not be subject to the "access to public records act" (APRA).

Climate Literacy Act

([H 7275](#), Cortvriend, House Education)

([S 2039](#), Lawson, Senate Education)

These acts would require that the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) implement a plan to ensure that all students enrolled in public schools or other schools managed and controlled by the state in grades kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) become environmentally and climate literate by the time they graduate from high school.

Early Childhood Educator Compensation

([H 7283](#), Casimiro, House Finance)

([S 2235](#), Cano, Senate Labor)

These acts would establish the Rhode Island Early Educator Investment Act to develop and implement strategies to improve the compensation of early childhood educators. These acts would also direct the children's cabinet to work with other state departments to establish goals to improve compensation for early childhood educators, which would include a target wage scale for early childhood educators aligned with the educator's education level and demonstrated competence in the field. These acts would also direct the Department of Human Services to implement a child care and early educator registry to include information about staff who work directly with children in all licensed child care centers and similar placements in the state.

Assault of School Employee

([H 7303](#), Craven, House Judiciary)

([S 2525](#), Lombardi, Senate Judiciary)

These acts would add immunity from liability and provide compensation for certain injuries for employees whose position within school directly involves work with students.

Threat of Mass Violence, Education and Other Institutions

([H 7308](#), Noret, House Judiciary)

([S 2395](#), Burke, Senate Judiciary)

These acts would make threats of mass violence and false reports of threats to any educational, religious institution, social, civic or fraternal associations a misdemeanor and would allow the court to set reasonable conditions of release of the defendant in order to ensure the safety of the community.

Statewide Public Meeting Notice Policy

([H 7311](#), Noret, House Judiciary)

This act would allow the publication of legal notices on the Secretary of State's official website, and a corresponding local newspaper which would satisfy the requirements for the publication of any statutorily-required notice, advertisement, or other written matter in a newspaper.

Public Notice Requirement - Secretary of State Website

([H 7312](#), Place, House Judiciary)

This act would authorize municipalities to publish public notices in any newspaper in circulation in the municipality or on any other platform designated by ordinance. Additionally, private entities may publish public notice by publication in one or more newspapers circulated in the geographic area where notice is required. Finally this act would provide that the state may provide public notice by posting on the secretary of state and department of administration websites. The notice provisions of this act do not apply to notice required in probate matters.

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