
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Universal School Breakfast and Lunch

On Thursday, March 7, the RIFTHP testified in support of legislation that would provide free school breakfast and free school lunch for all Rhode Island public school students. [H7400](#) by Representative Caldwell was heard on the House Finance Committee and garnered numerous supporters. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn submitted [written testimony](#) and RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi spoke at the hearing.

Flynn's letter said *"It is our belief that a healthy, well-balanced diet is a fundamental element of student success. We also believe that student hunger contributes to student absenteeism, poor academic performance, social and emotional stress, and disruptive behavior. It is our contention that food insecurity and improper nutrition exists across the entire economic spectrum and is not limited to students living in poverty."*

Opposition to the legislation was not articulated at the hearing, but opposition to last year's efforts centered on the significant cost of the proposal. There has not yet been an official fiscal analysis of Representative Caldwell's legislation by the staff of the House Finance Committee. Legislators asked for a detailed cost estimate that considers recent increases in federal funding for school meal programs. The bill was held for further study.

Education Funding Cut

[Article 8](#) of the proposed State Budget was considered by the House Finance Committee on March 7. Article 8 contains two beneficial proposals and one major cut to education funding. The RIFTHP testified at the hearing in support of increased education appropriations for English language learners as part of the state funding formula. Governor McKee has proposed increasing the categorical from 15% to 25% of base funding for each English language learner. The RIFTHP supported the move but noted that funding for multi-language learners should be incorporated into the base funding, not a separate categorical line item that does not increase yearly with rising costs. The RIFTHP also supported the proposal to have the state assume the full cost for students who currently qualify for reduced price lunch. If passed, school lunches would now be free for all students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. It would be RIFTHP's preference for full funding of a universal school breakfast and lunch program for all students.

RIFTHP opposition to Article 8 was triggered by the **\$25 million cut to education funding proposed by Governor McKee** when he proposed a cap on the cost index written into our funding formula. Without the benefit of any comprehensive study, the Governor proposed a change to the calculation of state education funding that would cost districts significant funding, more than is proposed by the English language learner funding hike. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi voiced opposition to the \$25 million cut that is based on a cap on education funding using the consumer price index even though education is a people business, not a commodity captured by the CPI. Parisi also objected to cuts in education funding that would further suppress teacher and school employee pay.

State Employment Licenses and Certificates

The RIFTHP provided written testimony in opposition to two bills that would deprofessionalize all positions governed by Rhode Island licensure and certification laws, including teaching and nursing. [H 7608](#) (Nardone) was heard in the House Corporations Committee and [H 7388](#) by Rep. Place was heard in the House State Government and Elections Committee on March 7. H 7608 uses the word “reciprocity” would unilaterally recognize out-of-state licenses in Rhode Island but would not require other states to recognize licenses and certificates held by Rhode Islanders. RI objected to this one-way street as something that would not help taxpaying Rhode Islanders and others holding RI licenses and certificates.

Similarly, the RIFTHP objected to the legislation sponsored by Rep. Place that would limit all state departments and agencies from creating or enforcing professional standards except for standards related to health and safety. The bill would effectively restrict the ability to have a meaningful professional license or certificates, completely deregulating all professions and trades in the state. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted this [letter](#) in opposition to H 7608 and this [letter](#) in opposition to [H 7388](#).

Rhode Island Presidential Primary

The Rhode Island Presidential Primary is scheduled for **Tuesday April 2**. While the parties’ two nominees are all but established, please be aware that the ballot will also include the selection of convention delegates. The RIFTHP urges all members and their families to vote on election day.

Bill Introductions

Maintenance of Effort Reduction - State-Controlled Schools

([H 7401](#), Slater, House Finance)

This bill would permit a school to calculate its maintenance of effort on a per-pupil basis and to deduct any nonrecurring expenditure from its maintenance of effort.

Maintenance of Effort Enforcement - State-Controlled Schools

([H 7402](#), Slater, House Finance)

This bill would exempt schools or school districts subject to an intervention for failing schools from the withholding of aid provisions for infractions related to nonpayment of tuition owed by one community to another. This bill would take effect upon passage and * would apply retroactively to all orders issued under § 16-5-30 on or after January 1, 2021, as well as to any and all pending orders or proceedings under § 16-5-30 as of the passage of this bill.

Public Employee Lien Prohibition

([H 7409](#), Baginski, House Judiciary)

([S 2428](#), Ciccone, Senate Judiciary)

These bills would provide that any benefit that a beneficiary is entitled to shall be exempt from lien, attachment or garnishment and would not be transferable or assignable and provides provisions for disclaiming any such benefit with regard to benefits paid upon the death or disability of a state or federal employee.

State Employee Contract Continuation

([H 7459](#), Vella-Wilkinson, House Labor)

This bill would require that if state employee unions are engaged in contract negotiations and/or utilizing the dispute resolution process to adopt a successor contract, all the terms and conditions in the existing collective bargaining agreement shall continue to remain in effect, even after its expiration.

Carried Interest -- Capital Gains

([H 7486](#), Ajello, House Finance)

([S 2596](#), Kallman, Senate Finance)

These bills would change the capital gain tax rates and reduce the holding period of assets from five (5) years to one year. These bills would also impose capital gains tax rates for investment management services interest as well as a non-owner-occupied property tax on residential properties assessed in excess of one million dollars (\$1,000,000). All Sections of this act, except for Section 2, would take effect on January 1, 2025, and 6 Section 2 would take effect on July 1, 2024.

Rhode Island Prekindergarten Education Act

([H 7497](#), McNamara, House Finance)

This bill would establish guidelines for the continued implementation and expansion of public, high quality prekindergarten education programs with the goal of reaching all children ages three (3) and four (4) throughout Rhode Island to increase children's school readiness. This bill would require continued investments in the RI Pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start models; require adequate funding to provide compensation parity with comparably qualified public kindergarten teaching staff; and require a 30% funding set-aside of prekindergarten expansion funds to sustain and expand access to high-quality childcare and early learning programs for infants and toddlers. This bill would also repeal the statutory laws pertaining to the initial pilot prekindergarten program.

Science and Technology Curriculum Implementation

([H 7513](#), McNamara, House Education)

This bill would delay the date for local education agencies to select one of the high-quality curricula and material for math and English language arts from June 30, 2025, to June 30, 2027.

Support And Access to Bilingual Education Act

([H 7514](#), Felix, House Education)

This bill would create a new chapter for the support and access to bilingual education. It would create a dual language program fund to be administered by the department of education. Local education agencies would be eligible to apply to the department for funding.

Promise and Hope Scholarship - Gap Year

([H 7544](#), Azzinaro, House Finance)

([S 2551](#), Gu, Senate Finance)

These bills would extend the time for which a student may enroll in either the Community College of Rhode Island or Rhode Island College in order to qualify for the Promise Scholarship or the Hope Scholarship would be extended up to one year after the student's high school graduation.

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