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# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## **Passing of Senator Maryellen Goodwin**

The RIFTHP is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Senator Maryellen Goodwin on Saturday, April 15, 2023. Maryellen served in the R. I. General Assembly since 1987 representing Senate District 1 in Providence. She was a tireless fighter for children, the elderly, and working women and men her entire career. She was a great friend to organized labor and sponsored and supported numerous bills and issues which helped our communities, our families, and our members. Senator Goodwin sponsored innumerable RIFTHP legislative priorities over the years, including bills to end required annual teacher evaluations, cap charter school growth and strengthen collective bargaining rights.

We offer our sincere condolences to Maryellen's family, legislative colleagues, friends, and everyone else who had the good fortune of knowing her. We will miss her huge smile and her enormous heart and will be forever grateful for all she has done for us.

## **Spring Break**

The Rhode Island General Assembly did not meet last week, observing the same April vacation as Rhode Island public schools. The Assembly returns today as the House Judiciary Committee will hold a lengthy hearing on numerous gun bills. The Assembly will now remain in session every week until a state budget is adopted, anticipated to be in mid to late June.

## **Rhode Island College HOPE Scholarship**

The RIFTHP and the local unions at RIC have prioritized the creation of a scholarship program at Rhode Island College called the Hope Scholarship Program. The Hope Scholarship is modeled on the RI Promise Program at CCRI, and is a last dollar scholarship for RIC Juniors and Seniors who meet certain eligibility requirements.

Last week, Governor Dan McKee introduced a budget amendment to incorporate the Hope Scholarship Program in the State Budget. The Governor's [Budget Amendment 9](#) allocates \$10.4 million in funding, of which \$9.4 million is Federal American Rescue Plan funding to pilot the program for three years. The budget amendment will be heard in the House Finance Committee later this week.

### **Green and Healthy Schools Online Petition**

A Climate Jobs RI initiative to get all schools to net zero energy efficiency by 2035 is encouraging people to support the initiative through an online petition. Legislation to place the goal in statute has been introduced by Rep. Arthur Handy ([H 6008](#)) and Senator Ryan Pearson ([S 537](#)). The legislation funds a position at RIDE to oversee the effort and contains enhanced funding for school districts renovating their schools. In order to get more information and sign the petition in support of the legislation, use the following link: <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/support-rhode-island-green-healthy-schools/>

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## **Bill Introductions**

### **Infringement of Parental Rights**

([H 5859](#), Morgan, House Education)

This bill would prevent the state or any governmental entity from infringing on the fundamental rights of parents in the upbringing of their children.

### **School Vaccination Forms - Waiver Information**

([H 5875](#), Phillips, House Health & Human Services)

This bill would provide that school forms pertaining to vaccination requirements include information about religious and medical exemptions.

### **School Health Mandates - Cost-Benefit Analysis**

([H 5878](#), Lima, House Health & Human Services)

This bill would require the Department of Health, in conjunction with the Department of Education, to conduct a cost-benefit analysis before a mandate relating to the health and safety of children in schools would be issued. This bill would also apply to any previous mandates issued, including, but not limited to, the mandate forcing children to wear masks.

### **Hazard Pay And Protection For Essential Workers**

([H 5931](#), Caldwell, House Labor)

This bill would create hazard pay for essential services during a public health crisis as issued by the governor.

### **State Employee Contract Continuation**

([H 5934](#), 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.

### **School Committee Elections - Age 16**

([H 5959](#), Ackerman, House State Government & Elections)

([S 0638](#), DiMario, 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.

### **RI Wavemaker Fellowships - EI Staff**

([H 5983](#), Giraldo, House Finance)

([S 0523](#), Gallo, Senate Finance)

These bills would require the commerce corporation to reserve ten (10) awards each calendar year for qualified applicants who are employed by certified early intervention agencies as speech language pathologist, occupational therapists, physical therapist, or other qualified professions on the wavemaker list, in hopes of addressing the staffing crisis of early intervention programs.

### **Home and Community Based Provider Rate Increase**

([H 5987](#), Casimiro, House Finance)

([S 0782](#), DiPalma, Senate Finance)

These bills would appropriate two hundred million dollars (\$200,000,000) for home and community based providers of Health and Human Services to provide a ten percent (10%) rate increase in order that providers may stabilize staffing levels, ensure adequate and safe care of residents and combat surging prices.

### **Public Employee Retiree - \$500 Stipend**

([H 6006](#), O'Brien, House Finance)

([S 0854](#), Britto, Senate Finance)

These bills would provide a one-time allowance of five hundred dollars (\$500) for eligible members of the Employees' Retirement System of Rhode Island.

### **Universal School Breakfast and Lunch**

([H 6007](#), Tanzi, House Finance)

([S 0071](#), Acosta, Senate Education)

These bills would repeal the current laws on mandatory school lunch and breakfast programs and establish a new standard that would require all public elementary and secondary schools to make reimbursable breakfasts and lunches available to all students under the rules and regulations of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the RI Department of Education. These bills would specifically require such matters as: (1) Maximizing access to federal funds; (2) Providing breakfast meals that can be picked up by students to eat outside the cafeteria; (3) Making breakfast available after the start of the

school day; (4) Providing longer lunch periods; (5) Improving meal quality by purchasing locally grown or produced food items; (6) Preparing fresh from scratch-cooked foods; (7) Providing culturally relevant meals; and (8) Engaging student and family voices in menu development. These bills would also mandate that the General Assembly make two (2) annual appropriations to fulfill the obligations of these bills.

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