
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

March 15, 2019

DSP Pay Increase

On Wednesday, March 6th, the House Labor Committee heard testimony on several minimum wage bills, including a bill by Representative Evan Shanley, [H5338](#), increase the minimum wage for Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) to \$15.00 over two years. DSPs work in day and residential programs with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The RIFTHP is working with SEIU, UNAP, IAM and the AFL-CIO to advocate for a significant pay increase for these workers.

Since the agencies that provide services to this population are totally reliant on state funding, raising the minimum wage would require increased state funding. RIFHP lobbyist James Parisi testified on the importance of the Shanley legislation, noting the staffing problems caused by low pay and benefits in the field. The legislation filed by the Warwick Representative has 49 co-sponsors.

RI Promise Expansion

Governor Gina Raimondo has proposed to expand the scholarship program that has existed for two years for CCRI students in two ways. She is seeking to expand it to adult learners at CCRI, and she wants the program to be available to Rhode Island College Juniors and Seniors. Her proposal is incorporated into [Article 11](#) of the State Budget. The Governor, many RIC students, and other advocates testified in support of the budget article on Tuesday, March 12th in the House Finance Committee. The expansion to RIC would not allow students to benefit from RI Promise at both CCRI and RIC.

Rhode Island College Professor Dr. Mikaila Arthur, Chair of the Sociology Department and RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the expansion of RI Promise to RIC. The RIFTHP and the RIC/AFT had advocated for this scholarship program at RIC when the Governor first proposed the idea two years ago. Parisi noted that the AFT has three local unions at RIC and reminded the committee that we were in full support of the program when it was first proposed to include Rhode Island College. Dr. Arthur provided some history and analysis of the State's support for its public higher education system.

She told the Committee that the *"situation used to be different. Until 1959, Rhode Island College was free for our students, so enacting Rhode Island Promise truly represents a return to our legacy. According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, Rhode Island in fiscal year 2017—the most recent available data—appropriated 15 percent less per full-time equivalent student than it did in 2008. Only four*

states spend less per person on higher education than Rhode Island does, and the US Department of Education reports that, controlling for inflation between 1998 and 2012 Rhode Island's spending on higher education dropped by 35%. Expanding Rhode Island Promise would help fix this."

Both the RIC faculty and Parisi noted that some of the details in Article 11 related higher education administration were problematic and infringe on institutional autonomy and needed to be corrected should the program be included in the state budget.

Tentative Agreement Posting

On Wednesday, March 13, 2019 the RIFTHP joined other public sector unions and the RI AFL-CIO in opposing a bill by Representative Price that would require the posting of tentative agreements of new and renegotiated collective bargaining agreements prior to executing the new contracts. [H5440](#) would require the RI State Labor Relations Board to post tentative agreements even though they have no role in the bargaining process other than adjudicating Unfair Labor Practice charges.

The unions spoke about the widespread availability of contracts, once ratified, on websites throughout the state. We objected to the bill because it would make the ratification process very burdensome. The wording of the bill could also require public posting of grievance settlements prior to signing the documents. No one testified in support of the bill. The House Labor Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Bill Introductions

K-2 Maximum Class Size

([H5047](#) Millea, House Finance)

([S0199](#) Gallo, Senate Education)

The RIFTHP supports these bills which would mandate that public-school classroom size be limited to twenty (20) students for kindergarten through grade two (2). Exceptions are made for emergencies and temporary situation not to exceed three (3) days and for mid-year enrollments when it would be impractical to assign the student any class but an existing class of maximum size.

Teacher/State/ Municipal Employee Pension Stipend

([S0212](#) Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would provide for a stipend to retired teachers, state workers and municipal workers of three percent (3%) of the first fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) of pension benefits up to four hundred fifty dollars (\$450) to be awarded to retirees the month following the anniversary date of retirement when no cost of living adjustment (COLA) is scheduled for that year.

School Consolidation

([S0266](#) Quezada, Senate Education)

The RIFTHP opposes this bill which would combine all public-school districts, and charter schools into one of four (4) school districts, based on counties effective August 21, 2022. The act also provides that the council

on elementary and secondary education would establish statewide curricula, and negotiate statewide teacher contracts as to salary and healthcare. The act would also provide that the school funding formula would remain in effect, except that the state would pay for all out-of-district placements for students with learning differences.

Dyslexia Training, Certification

([H5426](#) *Quattrocchi, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

([S0401](#) *Rogers, Senate Education*)

The RIFTHP opposes this bill which would require all elementary and secondary public schools to provide screening for dyslexia and related disorders to their students and establish an appropriate plan for their treatment and/or education commencing in the school year 2020-2021. The bill would require all elementary teachers, reading specialists and speech language pathologists to be certified in Orton-Gillingham.

State Share of Teacher Retirement Costs

([S0419](#) *DiPalma, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would gradually increase the state's contribution to the teachers' retirement system, while reducing the municipal contribution, eventually resulting in the contributions being shared equally.

Tuition Equity

([S0430](#) *Quezada, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would create the "student equal economic opportunity act" which would allow students who meet certain requirements to be exempt from paying nonresident tuition at Rhode Island universities, colleges or community colleges.

DSP Minimum Wage Increases

([H5338](#) *Shanley, House Labor*)

([S0437](#) *DiPalma, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would require certain employers who provide services to people with developmental disabilities to pay their employees no less than thirteen dollars and seventy-seven cents (\$13.77) per hour commencing July 1, 2019 and fifteen dollars (\$15.00) per hour commencing on July 1, 2020. This wage increase shall be funded by increased appropriation(s) to the department of behavioral healthcare, developmental disabilities, and hospitals.

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