
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Contract Continuation Moves Forward

Amended legislation that ensures that contract provisions remain in effect until a new contract is in place was approved by the House Labor Committee on a 15-1 vote on Wednesday, April 10th. [H5437 Sub A](#) (Vella-Wilkinson) was amended to ensure that contracts continue after expiration while the parties negotiate, mediate, and arbitrate. In the event an arbitration award is issued, matters not involving the expenditure of money are adopted and salary and benefits continue until agreement is reached by the parties.

Initially, the House posted an amended version of the bill that limited the scope of the bill exclusively to teachers. The RIFTHP and other municipal employee union were successful to get the amended bill to include municipal workers such as teacher assistants , custodians and secretaries.

The amended version is a compromise from the original version. We are hopeful that the bill gets the support of the House and Senate and avoids a Gubernatorial veto. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn said *"The RIFTHP appreciates the House Labor Committees' passage of this bill. This bill simply preserves the agreements both parties have made for over fifty years while they are negotiating new terms. It is a matter of fundamental fairness."*

The bill will be considered on the House floor the week after school vacation. The Senate is expected to consider the Senate version of the bill introduced by Senate Majority Leader Michael McCaffrey.

RIFTHP and RIC/AFT Support RI Promise

The Senate Education Committee and the Senate Finance Committee heard testimony from two Rhode Island College Professors in support of the Governor's proposal to expand the RI Promise scholarship program to RI College. The proposal, which is Article 11 of the state budget, was considered in a hearing on April 10th.

Dr. Mikaila Arthur, a Professor of Sociology, and Dr. Thomas Schmeling, a Professor in the Political Science Department both testified at the joint committee hearing. Dr. Arthur testified about the challenges RIC students face and how the RI Promise program would benefit students at the institution. She testified that many RIC students are first generation students who work many hours per week to pay for school. Dr. Schmeling talked about some concerns the faculty had with the details of the budget article, and how he and others had been working with the Governor's staff to resolve the differences and amend the budget article.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi also testified at the hearing, commenting that the three local unions at RIC and the K-12 members support financial assistance to RIC juniors and seniors with an expanded scholarship program. He further testified that Rhode Island ranks one of the worst states in country in its support of public higher education and that the RI Promise is a modest but important step to increase state support of public higher education.

HEW Bills Considered

On Wednesday, April 10th, the House HEW Committee heard testimony on several bills. Several items had laudable goals but were flawed legislation.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in opposition to [H5559](#) by Rep. Kislak that would require every Rhode Island teacher to be trained in emergency response skills such as CPR, Heimlich maneuver, and bleeding control. The RIFTHP informed the Committee that the Board of Education has just implemented a professional learning unit (PLU) requirement to maintain a teaching certificate. There are numerous bills filed this session that require teacher training, including bills that focus on curriculum alignment. Flynn testified that there is no state funding to support teacher professional development. He supported having someone trained in emergency response at each school, but that it should not be a requirement of each teacher.

RIFTHP also testified in opposition to a bill that would permit the video and audio recording of all classroom where children with disabilities that lead to the student not being able to communicate are taught. The bill, [H5737](#) was filed by freshman Rep. Caldwell.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in opposition to the bill. He noted the expense involved was not paid by the State and would be left to local school districts. He also noted that the bill only required parents and staff to be notified of the recordings, and that it did not recognize current policies that permit students to "opt-out" of being photographed or recorded. Flynn also questioned the necessity of the bill since these students are normally in settings with more than one adult.

Bill Introductions

State Employee – CART Services

([H5419](#) *Diaz, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

([S0305](#) *Crowley, Senate Health and Human Services*)

The RIFTHP supports these bills which would provide conditions to lawfully permit a state employee to be employed as an interpreter or a CART provider outside of the normal working hours.

State Employee Pension COLA – Investment Performance

([H5626](#) *O'Brien, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would award all members of the pension system a three percent (3%) annual benefit adjustment (COLA) applied to the first fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) of a member's retirement allowance on and after January 1, 2020, provided the prior year investment return yields a gain of ten percent (10%) or more until the pension system funding ratio exceeds eighty percent (80%).

Tax Credit – Public School Contributions

([H5634](#) *Solomon, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would create a tax credit for the amount in excess of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) contributed to a public school district for the express purpose of making physical improvements to a school.

Guns on School Grounds

([H5762](#) *Diaz, House Finance*)

([S0636](#) *Metts, Senate Judiciary*)

The RIFTHP supports these bills which would prohibit the possession of firearms within three hundred feet (300') of school grounds except for peace officers, retired law enforcement officers, persons under contract to provide school security services, firearms on private property and unloaded firearms in locked containers or a locked rack on motor vehicles.

Schools – Indoor Air Quality

([H5784](#) *Ranglin-Vassell, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would direct the Department of Health to establish an inspection and evaluation program and establish rules and regulations regarding air quality in elementary and secondary schools.

Teacher/Municipal/State Employee Pension Stipend

([H5819](#) *Craven, House Finance*)

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

The RIFTHP supports these bills which would provide for an increasing stipend to be paid to certain retired state employees, municipal employees, and teachers or their beneficiaries during years when a cost of living adjustment is not scheduled.

Tuition Equity

([H5919](#) *Diaz, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

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

The RIFTHP supports these bills which would create the "Rhode Island Student Success Act" which would identify those students who are exempt from paying nonresident tuition at public universities, colleges or community colleges.

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