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# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## **Revenue for Rhode Island**

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals serves on the steering committee of a coalition formed to support increased revenue by raising income taxes on the top 1% of earners in the State. Revenue for Rhode Island has established a website ([RevenueForRI.org](http://RevenueForRI.org)) explaining the proposal. Revenue for Rhode Island held a press conference on Tuesday February 25 to introduce the initiative. The bills, to be sponsored by Senator William Conley and Representative Karen Alzate, would increase income taxes on income over \$475,000 / year by three percent.

The press conference had almost 30 Senators and Representatives in attendance. Emceed by AFL-CIO President George Nee, the speakers included the bill sponsors, East Providence Mayor Bob DaSilva, Economic Progress Institute Executive Director Rachel Flum, and Seaniah Ballah, a RIC student and Direct Support Professional at Blackstone Valley ARC. All speakers noted how the additional \$128 million in revenue could be invested in K-12 and higher education, and social service programs to benefit all Rhode Islanders. To read a Projo article on the campaign, [click here](#).

## **School Field Trip Fundraising**

The House and Senate have passed legislation with some minor differences to permit schools to raise funds for field trips and other out of school activities. We anticipate that the different versions will be reconciled, and legislation should pass this year. The RIFTHP offered written testimony in support of the Senate bill, [S2327](#) when it was heard in the Senate Education Committee on Wednesday, February 12<sup>th</sup>. To view a copy of the letter of support, [click here](#).

## **K-2 Class Size Reduction Moves Forward**

On Wednesday, February 26, 2020 the Senate Education Committee took testimony on [S2179](#), a bill by Senator Hanna Gallo to reduce class size in grades K-2 by limiting the number of students in those grades to 20. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill. The Committee voted to approve the bill, and it will be considered on the Senate floor on Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>.

Parisi offered some data to the committee on information on contractual class size in union contracts in Rhode Island. Not every contract contains class size, and many provide that districts can exceed the class size by paying an overage stipend. He informed the Committee that the statewide average class size cap for Kindergarten is 22.5 students, and the average for Grades 1 and 2 is 24.5. He, along with several other proponents, argued the strong educational benefit of lower class sizes, particularly in early grades.

### **Education Bills Considered**

The RIFTHP offered testimony on two additional bills in the Senate Education Committee on Wednesday, February 26<sup>th</sup>. The RIFTHP supported legislation by Senate Education Committee Chair Hanna Gallo to support Civics Education by making it a graduation requirement. The RIFTHP urged the committee to consider ensuring that standards, curriculum and curricular materials are done in a thoughtful manner similar to last year's curriculum legislation. The RIFTHP also urged the Committee to consider providing resources necessary at RIDE to work on Civics, and school district resources for books, supplies and professional development. The Committee held [S2181](#) for further study as they work on amendments to the bill.

The RIFTHP also testified on [S2035](#) by Senator Roger Picard. His bill would require RIDE to create a model policy on Competency-based or Proficiency-based learning. The RIFTHP noted that before students are allowed to test out of certain areas, work needs to be done to require academic rigor to model policy. The RIFTHP also noted that the bill was not clear on how proficiency-based learning could impact state and local school district graduation requirements. The Senate Education Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

### **Municipal Privatization**

On Thursday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, the RIFTHP joined other union advocates to testify in support of [H7378](#) (Rep. Jackson et. al.) that would create rules that municipalities and school districts would have to follow before they privatize services currently being done by municipal or school district workers. The bill is modeled after legislation governing state work privatization which was enacted in 2007.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified before the House Municipal Government Committee that there ought to be a uniform process throughout Rhode Island for municipalities to follow should they want to privatize services. Parisi and other proponents noted that the bill would not prohibit municipal privatization, but it would require adequate notice to affected workers and would require that municipalities identify substantial savings should they privatize. The RIFTHP also testified that in at least one instance, a school district attempted to use privatization as a threat at the bargaining table to gain leverage, not to save money or enhance services to students. Such conduct highlighted the need to have a uniform process all municipalities would have to follow before a service is privatized.

## **Substance Abuse Prevention Funding**

Legislation has been introduced again , [S2123](#) (Sen. Miller and Sen. Seveney), this year to enhance substance abuse prevention programs in schools by dedicating certain marijuana fines to BHDDH-approved programs. Similar legislation passed the Senate last session only to die in the House of Representatives. The RIFTHP provided a letter in support of the bill ([click here](#)) at a hearing of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on Tuesday, February 11<sup>th</sup>. The Committee voted to approve the legislation. The Senate approved the bill on a 37-0 vote on February 25, 2020.

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