



# The SMITH HILL REPORT

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

March 13, 2020

## Charter School Moratorium Supported

On Wednesday, March 4, 2020, the RIFTHP offered testimony in support of Rep. Chris Millea's bill ([H7441](#)) that would create a three year moratorium on approval of new charter schools or new charter school expansion unless the Assembly changes the education funding formula. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn offered arguments in support of the bill in a letter ([click here](#)). He noted that the inequitable funding of schools unfairly hurts school districts with large charter school enrollment. Providence has 20% of its students attending state and charter schools, Pawtucket has 22% charter and state school enrollment, and Central Falls tops the list at 37%. Mayoral academy charter schools are overfunded by over \$1,000 per student because the teachers do not contribute to the retirement fund as do all other districts and charters.

## Student Discipline, Civics Bills Considered

On Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, the House HEW Committee heard testimony on over a dozen bills. The RIFTHP offered written testimony on legislation by Representative Brian Newbury to create Civics education standards in public schools. [H7577](#) is bipartisan legislation that was focused on performance-based assessments. The RIFTHP had previously testified on a related bill by Senator Gallo in the Senate Education Committee. To view our testimony in support of civics, [click here](#).

At the March 4<sup>th</sup> hearing, the RIFTHP also offered pointed testimony in opposition to [H7439](#) (Diaz) which would prohibit elementary student out-of-school suspensions. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified against the bill. He said school personnel, not the Assembly, ought to be the ones responsible for developing student discipline policy. He argued that the bill was overly restrictive and would lead to a less safe school environment not conducive to student learning. To view a copy of his letter to the Committee, [click here](#).

## Pi Day

Pi day is celebrated on March 14<sup>th</sup>.  $\pi$  is the numerical expression of the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter (3.14, hence March 14<sup>th</sup>). The Revenue for Rhode Island coalition used pi day as a theme to show the wide wealth inequality in our country, and our hopes of addressing it in part through a change in the

income tax structure to get more revenue. The coalition distributed flyers at the statehouse. [Click here](#) to view a copy of the Pi day flyer.

### **HEW Bills Supported**

The House HEW has had packed hearing agendas the last two weeks. On Wednesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, the Committee heard 19 different bills after five bills were pulled from the agenda. The RIFTHP had other committee business that day, but signed up in support of the following bills without providing testimony:

- [H7292](#) (Alzate) which would establish a goal of hiring minority teachers and provide mortgage assistance to teachers in low performing school districts.
- [H7581](#) (Jacquard) which would create temperature and humidity standards for public school classrooms.
- [H7797](#) (McNamara) which would direct school districts to establish attendance review teams to address high rates of absenteeism.
- [H7818](#) (Amore) which would provide state funding to help pay the costs of Advanced Placement course tests.
- [H7825](#) (Donovan) which would create student data and monitoring systems for emergent truant student behavior.

### **RIFTHP Supports DSP Pay Raise**

House and Senate legislation to create a \$15/hour minimum wage for Direct Support Professionals was heard the past two weeks. On March 4, 2020, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of [H7914](#) by Rep. Shanley in the House Labor Committee. A week later, Parisi testified in support of [S2707](#) by Senator DiPalma in the Senate Labor Committee. He urged the committees to pass the bills to raise wages for these workers who support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The RIFTHP represents DSPs and other staff at the J. Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center. To view Parisi's written testimony on Representative Shanley's bill, [click here](#).

### **Gun Bill Hearing Postponed**

The House of Representatives had scheduled a hearing on a number of gun bills on March 11<sup>th</sup> that was expected to attract thousands of advocates to the statehouse. The hearing was postponed due to concerns about the Covid-19 virus and the bills will be heard at a later date. One bill that the RIFTHP had planned to testify against is legislation to arm the campus police at Rhode Island College and CCRI. Another bill scheduled that day was [H7715](#) by Rep. Diaz, that would prevent those with a concealed carry permit for firearms to possess them on school grounds. AFT President Randi Weingarten and RIFTHP Frank Flynn had prepared testimony in support of the Safe Schools Act. To view President Weingarten's and President Flynn's written testimony, [click here](#).

### **Special Election**

Just prior to the beginning of session, Representative Shelby Maldonado from Central Falls announced her resignation from the General Assembly because she was moving to New York to take another job. A vacancy was declared and only one candidate submitted their name to fill the position. A special election was held on March 3, 2020 and Joshua Giraldo was elected to fill the seat. Mr. Giraldo is the Chief of Staff for Central Falls Mayor James Diossa and is a former teacher at Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy. Representative Giraldo was sworn in on March 12<sup>th</sup>.

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