
The



SMITH HILL REPORT

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

March 18, 2022

Pension Improvement Legislation

Two bills to improve the pension benefits of teachers, state workers and municipal workers were considered by the House Finance Committee on March 15. After a lengthy hearing on the Providence pension obligation bond bill, the House heard testimony on the two bills backed by the RIFTHP.

[H 6626](#) by Representative Deborah Fellela would change the age of retirement eligibility for public employees under ERSRI. Currently, if the age plus years of service added together is 95 or more and the employee is at least age 62, the person can retire instead of waiting for their full retirement age. The Fellela bill would change this rule of 95 to a rule of 90, where one aged 60 with at least 30 years of service would be eligible to retire.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill and offered a summary of why the bill is important ([click here](#)). He told the committee that the labor market has changed drastically, and the Assembly must improve retirement benefits for public sector workers to make the positions more attractive. He reminded them that the 2011 pension reductions were too drastic, and improvements need to be addressed this session.

Parisi also testified in support of [H 7124](#) by Representative McNamara. That bill would increase the amount of service credit a worker earns from 1% to 2% per year of service. This bill would not go into effect until July 1, 2022 and would impact teachers, state workers and municipal workers participating in the MERS plan. Parisi noted that other public sector pension plans including some public safety plans still provide a 2% accrual rate for earning pension credit, and that the plan needs to improve to make teaching and other public employment more attractive. The AFSCME Council 94 lobbyist testified in support of the pension bills, which also garnered support from the NEA/RI.

Additional Testimony in House Finance Committee

The House Finance Committee heard testimony on 15 pension bills on March 15. Roger Boudreau, President of the retiree chapter, testified in support of [H 7239](#), a bill by Rep. McEntee that would provide a partial COLA for retirees every year instead of the COLA being done every four years. The Fractional COLA bill is not particularly expensive for the state retirement system. Boudreau spoke of rising inflation and the need to not have retirees wait multiple years before any pension adjustment is made. Boudreau also offered his support for two other bills, [H 7497](#) by Rep. Messier and [H 7646](#) by Rep.

Lima that address COLA restoration for retired teachers, state workers and municipal workers. The RIFTHP also supported all COLA bills.

The RIFTHP signaled support of legislation by Representative Shanley that would close a loophole in pension law related to individuals who get a settlement for a workplace injury to prevent the payment from being offset by change in pension benefits. [H 7386](#) would amend the law to correct the oversight in pension law.

Senate Education Committee Highlights

The RIFTHP offered written testimony on four important bills heard in the Senate Education Committee on the Ides of March. The RIFTHP submitted a [letter](#) in support of the Climate Literacy Act. The act, [S 2039](#) by Senator Lawson, would convene stakeholders to review and recommend resources to infuse climate issues in various Rhode Island education programs. The RIFTHP also submitted a [letter](#) and data in support of Senator Hanna Gallo's bill to reduce class size in grades Kindergarten through Grade 2. [S 2282](#) mirrors a bill the Senate passed last year which died in the House.

The RIFTHP also submitted written testimony in opposition to two Senate bills. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted a [letter](#) opposing [S 2173](#), a bill by Senator Archambault that would require 80% of Rhode Island teachers to get trained in emergency first aid. The RIFTHP does not object to districts providing such training, but oppose another Assembly teacher training requirement. Finally, the RIFTHP objected to a bill by Senator Quezada that would make it more difficult for school administrators to issue student suspensions. In his [letter](#), Parisi objected to the Assembly interference in decisions best made at the school level that were in [S 2289](#). All of the bills heard in the Senate Education Committee were held for further study.

Adjunct Medical Insurance

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi and CCRI Adjunct Faculty member Phillip Wong offered testimony in support of [S 2199](#), a bill by Senator Miller that would require the State's three public higher education institutions to offer medical insurance benefits to adjunct faculty who work at least half the faculty load of full-time faculty. The RIFTHP also distributed a [fact sheet](#) explaining the bill and the reasons it should be supported. Committee members were receptive to the idea of providing medical insurance benefits for this group of employees. AFSCME Council 94 and the NEA/RI also supported the bill. Rhode Island College President Frank Sanchez submitted written testimony against the legislation. The RIFTHP represents adjunct faculty members at Rhode Island College.

Bill Introductions

Dual Language Immersion Policy

([S 2284](#), Quezada, Senate Education)

This act would require the department of education to create a model policy and timeline to assist local education agencies in implementing a dual language immersion program. This model policy and timeline

would be sent to the president of the senate and the speaker of the house by January 1, 2023 with annual reports commencing July 1, 2023 and thereafter.

Sex Education

[\(S 2285, Mack, Senate Education\)](#)

This act would amend the current law so that courses in family life or sex education would be taught in grades six through twelve and would be appropriate for students of all races, genders, sexual orientations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Teachings would recognize pleasure based sexual relations, different sexual orientations and be inclusive of same-sex relationships. The act would also provide that instruction include gender, gender expression, gender identity, and the harm of negative gender stereo types.

Career And Technical Education Tuition

[\(S 2286, Gallo, Senate Education\)](#)

This act would provide that the department of elementary and secondary education, in consultation with a workgroup composed of various stakeholders, would develop a funding formula for school districts sending students to career and technical programs outside their district.

Apprenticeship Pathways To Earning A Bachelor's Degree Act

[\(S 2287, Gallo, Senate Education\)](#)

This act would create the Apprenticeship Pathways to Earning a Bachelor's Degree Act, to enable an individual to earn a bachelor's degree at public higher education institutions throughout the state by earning credits through apprenticeships.

Student Bill of Rights

[\(S 2288, Quezada, Senate Education\)](#)

[\(H 7163, Diaz, House Education\)](#)

These acts would provide students attending public schools enrolled in grades K-12 with a students' bill of rights prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, gender, economic status or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disabilities.

Student Discipline Restrictions

[\(S 2289, Quezada, Senate Education\)](#)

This act would restrict the school administration to issue an out-of-school suspension to students in grade six (6) and above not only if they are disruptive, but also if they are a threat to the safety of students, teachers, or administrators; or found guilty of violating school regulations involving alcohol, illegal drugs or controlled substances, or weapons. The act would also provide that where students are in preschool through grade five (5), the school administration may issue an out-of-school suspension but only after a consultation with a school psychologist or other mental health professional.

Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Act

[\(S 2290, Pearson, Senate Education\)](#)

[\(H 7636, Amore, House Finance\)](#)

These acts would establish the Rhode Island hope scholarship act whereby the goal would be to increase the number of students enrolling in and obtaining degrees in a timely fashion from Rhode Island college. The hope scholarship act will provide up to the cost of two (2) years of tuition and mandatory fees for eligible students. The act would include detailed eligibility requirement for students, and reporting and disbursement requirements for Rhode Island college. In addition the act would permit charitable donations to the scholarship program in addition to an annual appropriation by the general assembly.

State Funding for ELL Certification

[\(S 2309, Pearson, Senate Finance\)](#)

This act would provide for a one-time appropriation of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) and an annual appropriation thereafter to Rhode Island college, for providing at no cost, certification and educational programs to teachers that are teaching English to speakers of other languages, bilingual education, or in multi-bilingual learning and for English as a second language.

Human Services - Rate Review

[\(S 2311, DiPalma, Senate Finance\)](#)

[\(H 7180, Casimiro, House Finance\)](#)

These acts would require the executive office of health and human services (EOHHS) with the assistance of a twenty four (24) person advisory committee to provide expert review and recommendations for the process for rate setting and ongoing review of rate setting for all social and human service programs with a contract with or licensed by the state or any department of the state as well as Medicaid.

Education Aid - Hold Harmless

[\(S 2312, Raptakis, Senate Finance\)](#)

This act would provide that in determining local school aid, the state would annually provide each community no less than an amount equal to the aid given in the preceding fiscal year.

Charter School Expenditure Cap

[\(S 2319, Goodwin, Senate Finance\)](#)

This act would provide limitations and prescribe caps on a district's total charter school expenses. The act would provide that a school district's budget for charter schools is not to exceed nine percent (9%) of the school district's budget unless the school district is under state control and then the school districts' budget for charter schools would not exceed twenty-three percent (23%).



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