

*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## RIFTHP Supports Full Day Kindergarten

In three separate hearings, RIFTHP representatives testified in support of measures to ensure that all Rhode Island students have access to full day kindergarten. Currently, seven communities do not offer universal full day kindergarten. They are: Warwick, Cranston, Johnston, Coventry, East Greenwich, North Kingstown and Tiverton.

On Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, Donna Rowland, a Lincoln kindergarten teacher, testified in support of legislation increasing state funding for districts that are in transition from a half-day program to a full day program. She described the significant difference her students experienced going to a full day program.

She also described how the connections she had with her students and parents improved working in a full day kindergarten classroom. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn also testified in support of Senator Gallo's bill [S0144](#). He cited parent support for a full day kindergarten program and the importance kindergarten has on student success. Others testifying in support of full day kindergarten were Tim Ryan of the Superintendents' Association, Tim Duffy of the School Committees' Association, Elizabeth Burke Bryant of Kids Count and Mary Archambault, a Providence School Social Worker.

On Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, RIFTHP Director of Professional Issues and Rhode Island Board of Education member Colleen Callahan testified in support of [Article 6](#) of the Governor's proposed budget in the Senate Finance Committee. Article 6 mandates that all school districts offer full day kindergarten by August 2016. The Article also eliminates state payment for private school

**April 15, 2015**

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transportation and ends the private school textbook loan program.

Colleen Callahan stressed the importance of providing more instructional time for young students as an effective strategy for closing achievement gaps. She cited RIFTHP recommendations in a report titled ***Shape of the Starting Line*** that highlight the importance of early childhood education.

Also on Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of legislation by Rep. Ucci [H5275](#) that provided enhanced state funding for districts that move to full day kindergarten. His legislation mirrors Senator Gallo's bill heard a day earlier. Rep. Ucci spoke about the two communities he represents, Johnston and Cranston, as places that do not currently offer full day kindergarten.



LaborVision is seen on Cox  
Ch. 14 and FioS Ch. 33

Tuesday @ 7PM

Thursday @ 7PM

Saturday @ 5PM

## Personnel Changes Questioned

The Senate Finance Committee took testimony on Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup> related to [Article 22](#) of the State Budget. Article 22 contains numerous changes related to state employment. Many of the changes solely impact classified state workers, but others would negatively impact RIFTHP members in the unclassified and nonclassified service.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered several pointed criticisms of Article 22. Overall, he asked the Committee not to support the \$22 million in unspecified cuts to state workers as proposed by Governor Raimondo. Parisi noted that while there would be less of a need for cuts of this magnitude if state revenue increases, any cuts to state workers who have suffered through many reductions over the years should be rejected. Parisi also objected to the cost shift that would increase premium cost share of certain retired state workers who are not yet Medicare eligible or who are on a disability retirement.

Article 22 freezes the longevity payments currently paid to state workers at the current dollar amount. The Assembly froze longevity in 2011, but longevity payments are a percent of salary. When salary increases, so does the longevity payment. Rainmondo's budget proposal would freeze those

longevity payments at June 30, 2015 levels. Parisi objected to the budget proposal and asked the Assembly to permit negotiations over longevity payments in the future.

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## RIFTHP Urges Expansion of Retiree Tax Break

[Article 11](#), Section 12 of the Governor's budget proposal provides a tax break for social security income if a retiree earns less than \$50,000 (or less than \$60,000 if filing a joint return). RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified on the Budget article before the House Finance Committee on April 9<sup>th</sup>. Parisi did not object to the tax break. Instead, he urged the Finance Committee to expand the tax break to include public employees not allowed to participate in social security. About half of the State's teachers are not afforded the opportunity to participate in social security. Therefore, Parisi argued that any retiree tax break considered by the Assembly should be expanded to include teachers and others who get public employee retirement income.

At the same hearing, Parisi also supported the Governor's proposed expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit. He told the Committee that hundreds of RIFTHP members earn a low income and that the tax break for low income workers should be expanded.

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## Standardized Testing Opt-Out

The Senate Education Committee heard from numerous advocates on the issue of a parent's ability or rights to opt out of PARCC and other standardized tests at a hearing on April 8<sup>th</sup>. The bill, [S0736](#) by Senator Satchell, would standardize a district's communications on the issue of a parent's right to opt their child out of standardized tests. The hearing had similar witnesses and testimony as the House HEW hearing held the previous week.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi supported the bill, noting that parents have rights that are merely being codified in state law. He told the Committee that teachers and other school staff were often caught in the crossfire when different messages about opting-out were offered by RIDE and school administrators.

The bill would offer clarity and a unified message about parental rights as it relates to testing. Parisi also reminded the Committee that these tests have, or will have, high stake implications for schools and teachers, not just students. School ratings led to the attempted mass termination of Central Falls High School teachers in 2010 due to student test scores.

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### Senate/House Contacts

To view a list of all 38 Senate members, including mail, phone and e-mail contact information, [click here](#).

To view a list of all 75 House members, including mail, phone and e-mail contact information, [click here](#).

This contact information will also be posted at the RIFTHP website at [www.RIFTHP.org/GAInfo](http://www.RIFTHP.org/GAInfo).

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