



January 22, 2016

## Charter Bills Move Foreword

Two bills which would reform the charter school approval process were passed by House committees this week. [H7051](#) sponsored by Representative Patricia Serpa require that city or town councils must support a charter school application before it is approved by the Rhode Island Board of Education. Last May, the RISE Mayoral Academy was approved by the Board of Education even though the councils and school committees of all three participating districts opposed the application. The RIFTHP supports this bill, a high priority for our union. The House HEW vote on January 20 was 13-2. Those voting in support of the legislation were:

Representative	District
Gregg Amore	65
Samuel A. Azzinaro	37
David A. Bennett	20
Dennis M. Canario	71
Arthur J. Corvese	55
Grace Diaz	11
Kathleen A. Fogarty	35
Arthur Handy	18
Shelby Maldonado	56
James N. McLaughlin	57
Joseph M. McNamara	19
Michael A. Morin	49
J. Aaron Regunberg	4

The two negative votes were cast by Republicans Representatives Robert Lancia (District 16) and Justin Price (District 39)

The House Finance Committee voted 13-2 to support [H7066](#) sponsored by Rep. Jay O’Grady which would require RIDE to make an affirmative finding that a new charter school would not have a

detrimental impact on the finances or academic program of sending school districts. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in support of the O'Grady legislation last week. The House Finance Committee voted 13-2 to support the bill on January 21. Those voting in support of the legislation were:

H7051 (Serpa) will be voted upon by the full House on Wednesday, January 27th and H7066 (O'Grady) will be voted upon on Thursday, January 28th.

### **Student Discipline Considered**

Two bills aimed at addressing racial and ethnic disparities in student suspensions were heard by the House HEW Committee on January 20. [H7056](#) by Rep. Grace Diaz and [H7057](#) by Rep. Lombardi contain similar language requiring all school superintendents to analyze discipline data and make plans to respond to any disparities "based on race, ethnic or disability status". The plans are to be submitted to the Board of Education's Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. Rep. Diaz's bill further requires the Superintendent to consult with faculty representatives prior to submitting the plan.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified at the bill hearing. He raised concerns about a second provision on each bill that would limit out of school suspensions to incidents of threats to students, teachers or administrators or to students considered persistently disruptive. Parisi objected to the limits the bill imposed on school administrators responsible for out-of-school suspensions and asked the language to be revised. The bills were held for further study.

### **Commissioner Wagner**

Commissioner Ken Wagner presented his ideas for education reform at a hearing of the Senate Education Committee on January 21. He will appear before the House HEW Committee on Wednesday, January 27. Those interested in watching his presentation, held after the 4:00pm floor session, can watch it on Capitol TV or on links provided at the General Assembly website. <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/CapTV/Pages/default.aspx>

### **Bill Introductions**

#### **"Get On Your Feet" Student Loan Forgiveness Program**

[\(H7009\)](#) *Shekarchi, House Finance*)

RIFTHP supports this act which would establish "The Get On Your Feet Loan Forgiveness Program" in Rhode Island, to assist recent college and university graduates in the repayment of their student loans, by providing a grace period for the first 2 years after graduation.

## **Charter School Approval - Local Control**

[\(H7051\)](#) *Serpa, House Health, Education and Welfare*

RIFTHP supports this act which would provide that the creation of a new charter public school or the expansion of an existing charter public school would require approval from the city or town council of each sending school district. Any charter public school seeking to expand up to and including its maximum capacity as set forth in the school's original application which had been approved prior to the effective date of this act would not be limited or prohibited. This act also does not prohibit any expansion of an existing charter public school which expansion was already completely approved by the council on elementary and secondary education or its predecessor prior to the effective date of this act.

## **Dyslexia Targeted Assistance**

[\(H7052\)](#) *O'Brien, House Health, Education and Welfare*

RIFTHP supports this act which would add dyslexia-targeted assistance as a required aspect of the literacy program for students at the elementary grade level.

## **Required Reading Disabilities Teacher Professional Development**

[\(H7055\)](#) *Lombardi, House Health, Education and Welfare*

RIFTHP opposes this act which requires certain teaching staff members annually complete at least two (2) hours of professional development instruction on the screening, intervention, accommodation, and use of technology for students with reading disabilities, including dyslexia. This bill also requires that the department of education provides professional development opportunities related to reading disabilities, including dyslexia, to school district personnel.