

*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## State Testing Program

The House HEW heard testimony on Wednesday, March 2 related to the creation of a statewide student testing program. Representative Joe McNamara, who is Chairperson of House HEW, introduced the bill [H7131](#) that would direct the Rhode Island Department of Education to develop a state system of testing including an alternative to the PARCC tests for the 2018-2019 school year. The bill would enable school districts to develop alternative testing programs provided they get the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education's approval. The bill declares that PARCC would not be given to 11th and 12th graders, who instead would take another assessment such as the PSAT, SAT or ACT.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of key concepts of the bill while highlighting several concerns. Parisi asked the sponsor to remove the bill's requirement that **all** students in grades 3 – 9 be tested in math and English language arts every year, noting that most teachers uniformly believe there is too much standardized testing. Parisi also asked that the high school alternative to PARCC be an option, not a requirement since there are no guarantees that these other assessments are free from cultural bias or would otherwise disadvantage urban youth. Finally, Parisi voiced concern that the legislation spoke about a testing program but did not restrict or otherwise define how these tests would be used. Other witnesses echoed these concerns during the hearing.

At this hearing, HEW also heard testimony on Representative Tanzi's bill [H7580](#) to require school districts to compile data on how much testing is being done at each grade level. Testimony was taken on Rep. McNamara's bill [H7426](#) to fund additional early childhood education programs. Testimony was also taken on McNamara's legislation [H7221](#) to compile student graduation data for all three public higher education institutions.

## Contract Continuation

On Thursday March 3, the House Labor Committee heard a bill that would ensure that a contract would continue after its expiration until a new contract is in place. [H7466](#) by Representative John

Carnevale would add a contract continuation provision to the teacher and municipal worker bargaining laws. School support staff bargain under the municipal employee statute. Rep. Carnevale also submitted contract continuation bills affecting police and firefighter contracts.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill. He told the committee that the bill is neutral, and that preserving the status quo favors neither the employer nor the workers. He recounted the contract dispute in Warwick in the early 1990s that litigated the issue. The State Labor Relations Board affirmed that contracts should continue until a new contract is negotiated. A Superior Court judge agreed. Parisi asked that this precedent be codified into state law. Also testifying in support of the legislation was AFSCME Council 94 and the RI AFL-CIO. Opposing the bill was the School Committee's Association, the Superintendent's Association and the League of Cities and Towns.

### **RIFTHP Leaders on Ballot as Clinton Delegates**

In order to run as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, individuals needed to secure the signatures of 150 voters last week. Four RIFTHP members are attempting to become delegates for the AFT-endorsed candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton at the Democratic National Convention that will be held in Philadelphia, PA in July. Delegates are elected based on their residency in each congressional district qualifying them to be placed on their prospective ballots. Due to a well-organized effort, hundreds of signatures were submitted for all four delegate candidates and we are pleased to announce that the following RIFTHP members have qualified. Submitting signatures to be a delegates from Congressional District 1 were **Fred Hoppe**, President of the Lincoln Teachers' Association, and RIFTHP Director of Professional Issues **Colleen Callahan**. Submitting in the Second Congressional District were **Lizbeth Larkin**, Cranston Teachers' Alliance President and RIFTHP Field Representative and Lobbyist **James Parisi**. Delegates are elected at the Rhode Island Presidential Primary on April 26.

### **Bill Introductions**

#### **DSP Minimum Wage**

[\(H7735 Barros, House Finance\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would require that every employer who provides services to persons with developmental disabilities, which are reimbursed for such services by the state, pay their employees fifteen dollars (\$15.00) an hour.

#### **Education Aid – Special Education Costs**

[\(H7885 O'Brien, House Finance\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would amend the definition of the term "extraordinary costs" for the purposes of excess costs associated with special education students. The new definition of extraordinary costs would be educational costs that are over three (3) times the average statewide special education cost.

## **School Vouchers**

[\(S2398\)](#) *Cote, Senate Education*)

The RIFTHP opposes this act which would provide parents of K-12 students in Rhode Island with an opportunity to enroll their child in an educational program of their choosing, either via open enrollment in a traditional public school in their own district or any other public school district, or by receiving a scholarship, with designated public monies to follow the student to a participating private school or private curriculum program selected by the parent. The program combines aspects of what are sometimes referred to as "school choice" and "school voucher" programs. The program would begin August 1, 2016.

## **Tax Equity**

[\(S2432\)](#) *Satchell, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would provide for the imposition of a two percent (2%) tax increase on personal income over two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) commencing January 1, 2017.

## **Income Tax Credit – Government Pension**

[\(S2451\)](#) *Lombardi, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would exempt federal, state, and local government pensions and military pensions from state income tax subject to income limitations.

## **Student Loan Debt Refinancing**

[\(S2453\)](#) *Gallo, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would specifically empower the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority to refinance and consolidate existing eligible loans. It would also authorize the Authority to purchase and invest in its own bonds and notes.

## **Education Funding – ELL**

[\(S2528\)](#) *Pichardo, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would establish state aid a funding formula for compensation of school districts for the additional costs of students learning English.

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