
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Guns in Schools

The hallways of the Statehouse were packed on Tuesday, March 22nd as the House Judiciary Committee heard a number of bills related to guns. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn provided written testimony in support of one bill related to schools. [H7243](#) by Rep. Edith Ajello would prevent a person who holds a permit to possess a concealed weapon from carrying a weapon in schools or on school grounds. The bill excludes police officers from the ban. President Flynn informed the Committee the bill would enhance the safety and security of teachers, staff and students.

Education Bills Heard

The Senate Education Committee heard testimony on several new education bills that were filed this session. Among the education bills considered was a bill by Sen. Coyne ([S2669](#)) which would require schools to offer 20 minutes of recess to all students grades K-5. Testimony both in support and opposition to [S2171](#) was also offered that afternoon. The bill by Senator Satchell would create a statewide policy on privacy of school owned-technology. Opposition was based on concerns that the bill would jeopardize federal E-Rate funding as well as concerns about specific provisions of the bill.

The Senate Education Committee also took testimony on legislation by Senator Raptakis ([S2262](#)) that would prevent schools from opening before Labor Day. Senator Gee offered legislation, [S2264](#), that would remove Columbus Day from the list of required school holidays.

The House HEW Committee received testimony on [H7519](#) by Rep. Kazarian that would require RIDE to collect data on school social worker caseloads and staffing. The RIFTHP signed-up in support of the legislation, which is comparable to legislation introduced by Senator Satchell that was previously heard in the Senate Education Committee. All of the bills were held for further study.

Big Week for Education

The Commissioner of Education will give an address to a joint session of the House of Representatives and the Senate on Wednesday, March 30th. In that speech, he is expected to announce his innovation and public school choice initiative that he has been working on for the past several months.

On Thursday, March 31st, the House Finance Committee will take testimony on [Article 11](#) of the State budget. In that Article, the Governor proposed some modest revisions to the education aid funding formula to allow school districts to deduct a small portion of their charter school payments in recognition of expenses school districts incur but charter schools do not. The proposed education formula deduction is \$355 per pupil. She also proposed a \$300 state payment for districts that enroll more than 5% of their students in charter schools.

Bill Introductions

Charter School Funding – Pension Offset

[\(H7965 Barros, House Finance\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would reduce a local school district's quarterly per pupil payments to charter schools which do not participate in either the state or a municipal pension system, based upon the district's per pupil pension cost. The district's per pupil pension cost would be calculated by taking a sending district's total contribution to pension costs for the district's school employees for the immediately preceding fiscal year, and dividing that figure by the district's total pupil enrollment as of January 1 of the immediately preceding fiscal year. That figure would then be multiplied by the number of students from the district attending a charter public school to produce the dollar figure which could be withheld by the sending district in its payment to a charter public school. The local school district would be permitted to expend these additional funds on schools operated and administered by the local school district.

Charter School Funding – Impact Aid

[\(S2742 Pearson, Senate Finance\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would provide that beginning in FY 2017, the state would pay the local share or contribution of charter public school tuition for all school districts with charter public school enrollments that combined, total more than five percent (5%) of the average daily membership of all pupils attending public schools within those school districts. This act also incorporates proposals from the governor's proposed FY 2016-2017 budget regarding charter school funding.

Charter School Funding – Impact Aid

[\(S2744 Pearson, Senate Finance\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would provide that beginning in FY 2017, the state would pay the local share or contribution of charter public school tuition for the number of students attending the charter public schools in excess of five percent (5%) the average daily membership of all pupils attending public schools within those school districts. This act would also incorporate proposals from the governor's proposed FY 2016-2017 budget regarding charter school funding.

Firearms on School Grounds

[\(S2761 Metts, Senate Judiciary\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would provide that only peace officers and persons approved by the school authorities for the purposes of educational instruction may carry firearms or other weapons on school grounds.

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