
The SMITH HILL REPORT

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Empowerment School Proposal Challenged

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn sent a letter to all Representatives this week outlining four specific objections to Governor Raimondo's Empowerment School proposal. The letter outlines issues such as:

- Lack of Local Approval
- Infringement on Collective Bargaining
- Principal Authority
- Teacher Certifications

The letter, sent to all 75 Representatives, can be viewed using [this link](#).

AFT Local 3726 Supports DSP Wage Hike

Three members of the Center Employees Union (CEU) Local 3726 who work at the Trudeau Center testified in support of Governor Raimondo's proposed funding to increase wages for Direct Support Professionals working with Rhode Island's developmentally disabled. The proposed budget of the department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals provides \$5.1 million in funding to increase reimbursement rates about 45 cents/hour. This would get the wage rate to \$12.00 / hour.

CEU Vice-President Roger Kelley testified in the House Finance Committee on April 12. He has worked at the Trudeau Center for 23 years and spoke of the 6 individuals he supports who will likely never be eligible for shared living. He talked about the extensive work a DSP does for only \$10.35 / hour. 19-year Trudeau DSP Robin Mercier testified as well, outlining the challenges of

caring for parents and children while trying to live on low DSP wages. Another CEU member, Laura Grisavich testified about getting her Associate's degree and then a Bachelor's degree in Human Services yet still earns low wages after over a decade of service. She feels client needs are not being met because of high turnover in staff caused by low wages. RIFTHP Director of Political Issues Maureen Martin supported the efforts to increase the reimbursement rates and shared a [history of wage rates](#) with the committee.



From Left: Laura Grisavich, Diane Anderson - CEU President, Roger Kelley, Robin Mercier, Maureen Martin

Rhode Island Presidential Primary

Rhode Island's Presidential Primary is **Tuesday, April 26**. On April 26, voters will be able to pick a presidential candidate and elect convention delegates for their chosen candidate. Running to be convention delegates pledged to support Hillary Clinton are four AFT members.

Voters in Congressional District 1 will be able to vote for Hillary Clinton delegates:

- **Fred Hoppe**, Lincoln Teachers' Association President
- **Colleen Callahan**, RIFTHP Director of Professional Issues

Voters in Congressional District 2 will be able to vote for Hillary Clinton delegates:

- **Lizbeth Larkin**, Cranston Teachers' Alliance President
- **James Parisi**, RIFTHP Field Representative and Lobbyist.

Bill Introductions

Budget Commission Authority – Superintendents

([S2021](#) Picard, Senate Education)

This act would require the selection of one member of a budget commission by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education whenever a school system is involved and would exempt from removal the school superintendent and certain responsibilities of the school committee and superintendent from the commission's powers.

Budget Commission Authority – School Personnel

([S2025](#) Picard, Senate Finance)

This act would prohibit a budget commission from selecting, hiring or firing specific city, town, educational, police or fire district employees.

School Calendar – Election Day

([S2263](#) Gee, Senate Education)

This act would grant to each individual municipal school department the power to determine whether their schools would be open on a particular scheduled election day.

Post-Retirement Employment – Nurses and Nurse Faculty

([S2277](#) Fogarty, Senate Finance)

This act would allow retired state employee nurses to work as part-time professors in the nursing program at a state college, for seventy-five (75) days or one hundred fifty (150) half days, before their pension payments would be suspended. The act would also remove the exception that allowed retired state employee nurses to return to work for cities and towns, under emergency budget commissions, without a suspension of their retirement benefits.

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