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# SMITH HILL REPORT

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## Thank You

Thanks to the efforts of approximately 3,000 RIFTHP members, every Rhode Island Senator is receiving a stack of postcards this weekend. The postcards are in support of legislation that would give local communities the ability to approve or deny applications for new charter schools and growth of existing charter schools beyond what has already been approved by the Board of Education. Most K-12 local unions did a superlative job in distributing and collecting postcards on short notice. The House passed local approval legislation in late January and the Senate has not yet taken up the bill.

## Survivor Benefit Increase Proposed

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified Tuesday, May 24th before the Senate Finance Committee in support of legislation that would increase teacher survivor benefits . [S2679](#) by Senator DaPonte would improve benefits in a program offered to teachers who do not participate in social security. The monthly proposed increase would raise the benefit from \$1250 to \$1900/month for the spouse of a deceased member who earned more than \$50,000/year. The program is currently 153 % funded so the benefit hike would not jeopardize future beneficiaries. RI AFT/Retiree chapter President Roger Boudreau also offered testimony in support of the legislation.

## DSP Rate Hike Supported

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in support of legislation increasing the minimum wage for Direct Support Professionals (DSP) working with the State's developmentally disabled in a hearing in the Senate Finance Committee on May 24th. He cited the high turnover caused by low pay and the need to provide quality services for the developmentally disabled with a stable,

caring workforce. The bill, [S2191](#) by Senator DiPalma, would raise the minimum wage of DSPs to \$13.97 / hour.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of legislation by Rep. Jean Phillippe Barros that would create a minimum wage of \$15.00/hour for Direct Support Professionals (DSP) working with the State's developmentally disabled. The bill, [H7735](#) was also supported by Emmanuel Faulk of SEIU in a hearing on May 19th. John Simmons of the RI Public Expenditure Council testified against the bill citing concern about creating a minimum wage for a limited segment of a company's workforce.

President Flynn provided written testimony in support of Governor Raimondo's proposed addition of \$2 million dedicated to DSP wage increases when her BHDDH budget amendment was heard by the Senate Finance Committee on May 26th. [Click here](#) to view his letter.

### **Charter School Funding Debated**

On Thursday, May 19th, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of two bills submitted by Rep. Jean Phillippe Barros. [H7965](#) would permit school districts to withhold a portion of tuition to mayoral academy charter schools for pension costs they incur and mayoral academies do not. For years, mayoral academies have been overfunded because their staff are not in ERSRI even though the schools are funded by districts based on actual district costs which includes ERSRI payments. Passage of the legislation would permit districts to save \$1.8 million in funding now being provided to Mayoral Academies. Mayoral Academy supporters opposed the bill and labeled their less expensive pension benefit as "innovation."

Another bill by Rep. Barros, [H7067](#), would require the elimination of local payment for charter school tuition. RIFTHP testified in support of the concept that if schools are created by the state without local approval, then local taxpayer dollars should not be required to leave districts in the form of payment to state-approved charter schools.



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