

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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RIFTHP Supports Pension COLA Bill

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in support of legislation that would provide a 3% cost of living adjustment on the first \$50,000 in instances when the pension investments grow at least 10% in a year. The legislation, [H5992](#), was heard in the House Finance Committee on Wednesday, May 3rd. The bill, which had 22 co-sponsors, was introduced by Rep. William O'Brien, a Providence teacher. Flynn asked the committee to consider supporting the legislation because the cost would be covered by investment returns greater than anticipated in those years when the market caused the pension fund to grow. Flynn reminded the Committee that half of the state's teachers were not part of the Social Security system and would not have any other means of protecting their retirement income from inflation without the COLA.

Joining Frank Flynn at the table to testify in support of the legislation was RIAFT/R President Roger Boudreau and Jim Cenerini of AFSCME Council 94 (pictured below). Boudreau, the former President of the Lincoln Teachers' Association, spoke in support of the COLA adjustment on behalf of retirees.



House Finance Hears Charter Funding Bills

On May 4th, the House Finance Committee received testimony about two charter school funding bills. [H5459](#) by Representative O'Brien, would allow school districts to reduce tuition payments to Mayoral Academies by the amount of money that districts spend on pension costs. Mayoral Academies are allowed to not participate in the Employees' Retirement System of Rhode Island (ERSRI) and have a much lower pension expense than school district. Most of a school district's pension cost is related to unfunded liabilities from the past, not current cost to fund retirement benefits for teachers. The bill also would allow reduced district tuition payments to the MET school, a state-run school that also does not participate in ERSRI.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill. He informed the committee that in last year's session, the Assembly reduced district charter tuition payments only for certain districts that have expenses over 7% of those paid by charter schools. He distributed a chart showing the 9 districts that could reduce tuition payments by an average of \$950 per student. Since the law only affects districts that send students to Mayoral Academies, the only two districts that currently pay reduced charter tuition are Central Falls and Pawtucket.

If passed, the bill would allow the other school districts that send students to Mayoral Academies to reduce charter tuition by a similar amount of money per student. Affected districts would be Providence, Cranston, Warwick, North Providence, Lincoln, Woonsocket, Cumberland, Burrillville and North Smithfield. Staff of Mayoral Academies and a representative of the MET school testified against the bill. Tim Duffy of the School Committees Association and Tim Ryan, representing Superintendents, also testified in support of the bill.

Parisi also voiced support of a bill that would provide for additional state funding in response to charter school expansion. [H5980](#) by Representative Alex Marszalkowski would provide state payment for all charter school tuition in districts where the charter school enrollment exceeds 5% of the student body. The bill is identical to legislation considered by the Senate Finance Committee a week earlier. Parisi called charter tuition a huge unfunded mandate and that the state should pay the cost if the state, not the local community, was creating charter schools.

RIFTHP Speaks on CTE Funding Plan

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified on legislation introduced by Senator Hanna Gallo. The bill, [S0437](#), would require RIDE to develop a funding mechanism for districts that pay other districts for students attending Career and Technical Education programs in other school districts. The bill was heard in the Senate Education Committee on May 3rd. Flynn asked that teachers be part of the process in developing such a plan. He raised financial concerns because of the increase in instances of students crossing district lines.

Adjunct Medical Insurance Bill Heard

On Wednesday, May 3rd, legislation to provide medical insurance for adjunct faculty at Rhode Island's three public higher education institutions was heard in the House Finance Committee. RIC Adjunct Faculty Union President Deborah Kaspin (pictured below) and RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of [H5367](#) introduced by Rep. Jacquard. Parisi offered a fact sheet and a proposed amendment related to premium cost-share should the bill pass.

Kaspin informed the committee that adjuncts who earn salary barely above \$20,000/year have difficulty buying medical insurance on the exchange. She explained why of Post-secondary Commission's cost estimates are wrong and misleading. She reminded the committee that adjuncts are necessary to the institutions, yet they are one of the only group of state workers deemed ineligible for medical insurance benefits.



House Arbitrator Selection Bill Considered

A House bill to change the method of appointing arbitrators under the different public employee contract arbitration statutes was heard by the House Labor Committee on Thursday, May 4th. The bill, [H6154](#), is identical to legislation heard in the Senate Labor Committee a week earlier. The bill would eliminate the American Arbitration Association from the selection process and require that arbitrators be retired Rhode Island judges and magistrates. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi objected to the bill. Parisi argued that the bill eliminates the element of choice with the current arbitrator selection system. He again argued that retired judges who escaped the onerous pension cuts in 2011 do not need special legislation for additional work.

Bill Introductions

School Social Worker Data Collection

([S0099](#) Satchell, Senate Education)

([H5325](#) Kazarian, House Health Education and Welfare)

These bills would create a process for the department of education collection and organization of information concerning the workload and scope of the duties and responsibility performed by school social workers.

Competency-Based Education Regulations

([S0103](#) Picard, Senate Education)

This bill would require that the board of elementary and secondary education adopt a competency-based/proficiency-based learning policy whereby students can earn credits through demonstration of competency.

Child Opportunities Zones

([S0104](#) Picard, Senate Education)

This bill would define and declare the purpose of child opportunity zones and would provide for annual reporting from the commissioner of elementary and secondary education to the general assembly on each zone.

Medicaid Reimbursement – School Social Worker / Psychologists

([H5077](#) Lombardi, House Health Education and Welfare)

This bill would direct that services provided by school social workers and certified school psychologists would be included as health care related services eligible for federal Medicaid reimbursement

Dual Enrollment Eligibility - Home Schooling

([S0201](#) Cote, Senate Education)

([H5083](#) Casey, House Health Education and Welfare)

([H5352](#) Casey, House Health Education and Welfare)

These bills would extend the benefits of the dual enrollment equal opportunity act to cover home-schooled students.

PSAT and SAT Test Payments – Home Schooling

([H5088](#) Casey, House Finance)

This bill would include home schooled students in the program to provide the PSAT and SAT free of charge to all Rhode Island public school students.



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