
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Contract Continuation Bill Posted for Vote

The primary legislative priority this session for the RIFTHP is enactment of legislation to ensure a teacher or municipal worker contract continues until a new agreement is negotiated by the parties. The House version of the bill, [H5593](#) by Camille Vella-Wilkinson, is scheduled for a vote in the House Labor Committee on Wednesday, June 21st.

State Budget Highlights

The RIFTHP has worked on several issues related to the proposed FY 2018 State Budget. On Thursday, June 15th, the House Finance Committee approved its version of the budget. The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on the budget on Thursday, June 22nd. Among the highlights (and lowlight) of the budget bill are:

Education Funding

The proposed State Budget funds the increased spending of \$45 million on K-12 schools for the following year. This is the last year that certain districts that had been underfunded prior to adoption of a funding formula are realizing an increase in state aid to education. Increases in state funding for public schools in future years will be more constrained unless revisions to the funding formula are adopted.

English Language Learners

Last year, the Assembly provided a one-time infusion of state funding to support the instruction of English Language Learners (ELL). The RIFTHP testified in support of making this funding a permanent feature of the RI education aid formula. The budget passed by the Assembly ensures that this budget, and future state budgets, provides additional state support for ELL programs by

creating a new defined budget category. The Assembly will again provide \$2.5 million to support these programs in FY 2018.

DSP Wage Increase

The RIFTHP has frequently advocated for increased state funding to provide for a wage increase for Direct Support Professionals who assist those with developmental disabilities. The FY 2018 budget, funds an increased reimbursement for DSP wages, expected to be about 5%.

RI Promise Scholarships

The RIFTHP supported the Governor's proposal to provide two years of tuition at CCRI, RIC or URI, commencing with those who graduate high school this year. The RIC AFT faculty union was particularly active in its support of the program. The RIFTHP is deeply disappointed that the House Finance Committee budget excludes RIC and URI from the tuition program. This will have a negative impact on RIC enrollment and the programs offered at the College. Also eliminated was \$2 million in funding to Rhode Island College to enhance its programs. The RIFTHP supports an amendment to the budget bill to restore RIC to the tuition program.

Mayoral Academy Funding

The RIFTHP has advocated to amend the charter school funding system to allow districts to withhold a portion of charter school tuition to mayoral academies. Rhode Island overfunds mayoral academies by about \$950 per student because the charter networks do not participate in the pension system. The State Budget adopted by the House Finance Committee failed to address this issue while adding \$9 million more in formula aid to charter schools.

Bills on the Move

The following bills have passed the Committee process and the full chamber of either the House or the Senate. To be enacted into law, the bill must pass the same process in the other chamber before being sent to the Governor for approval.

Post Retirement Employment – Faculty - \$15,000 to \$18,000

[\(H5368\)](#) *Jacquard, House Floor*

This bill would increase the maximum post retirement employment earnings from \$15,000 to \$18,000 a year for retired educators who provide instruction at state colleges.

Post-Retirement Employment - Nursing Faculty

[\(H6130\)](#) *Keable, House Floor*

[\(S0207A Fogarty, Senate Finance\)](#)

These bills would allow retired state employee nurses to work as professors in the nursing program at a state college or university. It would allow them to work seventy-five (75) days or one hundred fifty (150) half days before their pension payments would be suspended.

School Closings – Virtual Education

[\(S0101 Picard, House Health Education and Welfare\)](#)

This bill would establish a process by which a virtual education plan may be established and used by school districts during inclement weather which would count as a school day, provided that the plan is approved by the council on elementary and secondary education.

Media Literacy Policy

[\(S0106 Satchell, House Health Education and Welfare\)](#)

This bill would require the department of education to consider incorporating media literacy education in the basic education programs.

Asian Student Data Collection

[\(S0439 Calkin, House Health Education and Welfare\)](#)

[\(H5453A Diaz, Senate Education\)](#)

These bills would create the "All Students Count Act" and would require the department of elementary and secondary education to use separate collection categories and tabulations for specified Asian ethnic groups in every demographic report on ancestry or ethnic origins of residents.

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