

*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



PUBLISHED BY THE RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS/AFT, AFL-CIO

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April 27, 2018

## **RIFTHP Supports Safe Schools Act**

The Safe Schools Act, [H7591](#) by Rep. Katherine Kazarian et al, would close a loophole which permits those with a conceal and carry gun permit to possess guns in schools. The bill would permit police officers to carry guns, but prevent others from possessing firearms in schools. The hotly-contested lengthy hearing on this bill, and other gun legislation was held by the House Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn was quoted in a [Providence Journal article](#) on the issue supporting the legislation. He also expressed opposition to efforts to arm school teachers. The RIFTHP Executive Council recently unanimously passed a resolution on school safety, including references to the presence of guns in schools and in our communities. That resolution was distributed while the RIFTHP testified in support of Safe Schools Act.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified at the April 24<sup>th</sup> hearing. He acknowledged some individual teachers would want to possess firearms in schools and have permits allowing them to do so. However, he urged the Committee to lessen the presence of firearms in schools by passing H7591. He also distributed written [testimony](#) in support of the bill along with the [RIFTHP Executive Board resolution](#).

## **Pension Stipend Legislation Introduced**

Rep. Mary Messier introduced legislation to award a pension stipend, or supplemental payment, in years in which a pension COLA is not paid. Her bill, [H8056](#), was heard in the House Finance Committee on Thursday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. The bill would award a stipend of up to \$450 in each year a COLA is not awarded to retired teachers, state workers and municipal workers. Testifying in support of the legislation was RI AFT/R President Roger Boudreau and Mike Connelly, an AFSCME retiree leader.

RI AFT/R is conducting an email campaign in support of the legislation to award a pension stipend to assist those retirees who have seen their income reduced because of the 2011 pension cuts. To view and participate in the campaign, [click here](#).

## **House Finance Committee Legislation**

The RIFTHP testified in support of two bills heard in the House Finance Committee on Thursday April 26. The Union supported Rep Grace Diaz' bill, [H7137](#). The bill would preserve the existing regulatory tuition program in statute to continue permitting undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill, as he has in previous years. He spoke about how important it is for students to get additional education opportunities by lowering state tuition costs for this small group of higher education students. The former and current Governors both support the policy. Parisi noted that the current ever-changing Governor's race indicates that it would be important to secure this tuition equity program by preserving it in statute in case a different Governor not supporting the program gets elected.

The RIFTHP lobbyist also testified in support of Rep. Arthur Handy's bill, [H7357](#). His bill would prevent the reduction of annual state contributions to teacher and state worker pension plans from one year to the next. Under current law, state contributions vary depending on stock market performance, actuarial assumptions and other factors. Parisi offered support of the bill, reminding Assembly members that the Assembly had broken promises on established pension benefits in the past, and they should do everything possible to get to 80% funding so that the annual pension COLA could be restored. He informed the Committee that Rep. Handy's bill was simply a modest measure that supports sufficient funding of pension plans.

## **Bill Introductions**

### **Mayoral Academy Student Demographics**

[\(S2649\)](#) *Pearson, Senate Education*

This bill would require the student populations of mayoral academies to reflect the combined demographics of the sending district(s) in terms of the number of students in special education, who are English language learners, and who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals.

### **School Construction Funding – Increase for School Safety**

[\(S2773\)](#) *Lombardi, Senate Education*

This bill would increase the school housing aid share ratio by five percent (5%) for school safety and security projects. For annual appropriations by the general assembly for school housing aid, remaining monies not appropriated in a particular fiscal year shall be remitted for school safety and security as determined by the board of education.

### **Safe Schools Program – School Resource Officers**

([S2774](#) Archambault, Senate Finance)

([S2796](#) Fogarty, Senate Judiciary)

([H7919](#) Amore, House Finance)

The these bills which would establish a process of funding and ensuring that our public schools remain safer and secure. The Safe School Program would require that a certified school resource officer be employed at each public school and would allow for each school department to seek an additional five percent (5%) reimbursement for school construction projects related to safety.

### **Teacher/State/Municipal Pension Stipend**

([S2820](#) Sosnowski , Senate Finance)

([H8056](#) Messier, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports these bills which would provide for a stipend to be paid to certain retired state employees, municipal employees, and teachers or their beneficiaries during years when a cost of living adjustment is not scheduled.

### **School Safety Assessment Program Funding**

([H8057](#) Mendonca, House Finance)

This bill would establish a restricted receipt account for the purpose of funding school safety evaluations, to be known as the "Rhode Island Public School Safety Evaluation Program Fund."

### **DD Funding Increase – Minimum Wage Match**

([H8066](#) Tanzi, House Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would increase funding appropriated to staffing for developmental disabilities direct support services by an equal amount when an increase of the minimum wage rate occurs.

### **State Funding – Private School Transportation**

([H8100](#) Tanzi, House Finance)

This bill would provide that the state would reimburse school committees for the cost of providing student transportation services to public and private school pupils.

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