

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Senator Frank Lombardo Passes Away



Senator Frank Lombardo III passed away on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. He was first elected Senator of Senate District 25 in 2010. The Senate district is entirely within the Town of Johnston. He is survived by his wife Patricia, who works as a secretary at Johnston High School. He is also survived by a son Frank Lombardo IV and a daughter Victoria Aceto.

Senator Lombardo had served as Chair of the Senate Housing and Municipal Government Committee. He also served on the Labor Committee, the Commerce Committee and the Oversight Committee. A funeral will be held on Tuesday, February 27, 2024.

Normally, if there is a vacancy in the Rhode Island General Assembly, a special election must be held to fill the vacant seat. No election can be held if the vacancy happens after the first Monday in February during an election year. Therefore, the Senate District 25 vacancy will remain unfilled until the November election.

Final Pension Advisory Working Group Meeting Scheduled

The final scheduled meeting of the Pension Advisory Working Group will be on Monday February 26 at 3:00 PM in the Senate Lounge. Information on viewing the hearing can be found on the [meeting agenda](#).

Bill Introductions

Universal School Breakfast and Lunch

([H 7337](#), Sanchez, House Finance)

([S 2046](#), Acosta, Senate Finance)

These bills would require free breakfast and lunches to be provided for all elementary and secondary students attending public schools.

Millionaires' Tax

([H 7338](#), Alzate, House Finance)

([S 2355](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

These bills would impose a Rhode Island personal income surtax of three percent (3%) on taxable income over one million dollars (\$1,000,000), with the existing three-bracket personal income tax structure remaining in place. This surtax would be imposed on taxable income after all modifications, standard deductions, and exemptions have been applied. These bills would also require that the tax revenue collected from this surtax be placed into a restricted receipts account to be used for affordable, reliable, and quality child care and early learning programs; quality public education; affordable public colleges and universities; the repair and maintenance of roads and bridges; and public transportation. The division of taxation would annually report to the general assembly as to the amount collected and distributed.

Retired Teacher and State Worker 3% Stipend

([H 7342](#), Serpa, House Finance)

This bill would provide all retired teachers and all retired state employees a one-time stipend in the amount of three percent (3%) of the lesser of either the member's retirement allowance or forty thousand dollars (\$40,000) of the member's retirement allowance.

Rule of 90

([H 7343](#), Fellela, House Finance)

([S 2308](#), Ciccone, Senate Finance)

These bills would allow school teachers, state and municipal employees, to be eligible to retire, effective July 1, 2024, upon the earlier of: (1) Attaining at least the age of sixty (60) and the completion of at least thirty (30) years of total service; (2) The completion of at least five (5) years of contributory service and attainment of social security retirement age, and five (5) or more years contributory service, who have a relevant age of social security retirement age, with the age being adjusted downward in proportion to the service the teacher has earned as of June 30, 2012.

All Charter Public School Model

([H 7354](#), Place, House Education)

This bill would allow charter schools to engage in nontraditional approaches to learning, which must be approved by the Department of Education, and would also require that seats allocated to a charter school, whose charter has not been renewed, be reallocated to a school which offers nontraditional approaches and methods to learning. Additionally, This bill would permit local communities to adopt an all-charter school public school model for public education. This bill would provide that adoption of this model would require an affirmative vote of the local municipality's council and school committee, followed by an affirmative vote on a referendum on the adoption, at a special or general election in the municipality.

Student Access to Transcripts

([H 7355](#), Speakman, House Education)

([S 2289](#), Cano, Senate Education)

These bills would prohibit colleges and universities from withholding a student's transcript due to the student failing to pay any expenses owed to the college or university. The college or university may withhold a student's academic credits and grades as well as diploma or degree for failure to pay.

Schools - Pesticide Control

([H 7359](#), Carson, House Environment and Natural Resources)

([S 2296](#), Miller, Senate Environment & Agriculture)

These bills would prohibit the application of lawn care pesticides on the grounds of any public or private pre-school or public or private school with students in grade twelve (12) or lower, except in an emergency situation or to be used on the playing fields and playgrounds of the school as well as pre-schools and child care centers pursuant to an integrated pest management plan as developed by the Department of Environmental management and the Department of Health and would create a task force to study health risks of the PFAS in athletic fields to students, who use them.

Professional Licensure Deregulation

([H 7388](#), Place, House State Government & Elections)

This bill would establish procedures to ensure that agency regulations or public service restrictions do not unjustly restrict individuals from entering into businesses, professions or public services and that the regulations or restrictions achieve articulable, legitimate public health, safety and welfare objectives. This bill would also allow the operation of a home-based business, as long as it meets the criteria for a home office IRS income tax deduction, without securing any approvals from the municipality. The business may not store chemicals or other hazardous materials, may not park heavy equipment and not more than ten percent (10%) of the premises is used for parking, notwithstanding any contrary zoning law or ordinance. This bill would further allow any licensed barber, hairdresser, pedicurist, manicurist, or individual providing makeup application services to provide training services for individuals that presently do not have such a license, and upon the completion of a four (4) year training period, the trainee shall be entitled to receive a license, although the division may require more training for the use of hazardous chemicals.

Categorical Education Aid - Mental and Behavioral Health

([H 7397](#), Alzate, House Finance)

This bill would provide that the permanent foundation educational aid program would provide state funding for school-based mental health services pursuant to specified conditions.

Universal School Breakfast and Lunch

([H 7400](#), Caldwell, House Finance)

([S 2320](#), Cano, Senate Finance)

This bill would establish a statewide universal school breakfast and lunch program in Rhode Island public schools. The bill would direct that in operating its school breakfast and lunch program, each public educational entity would seek to maximize access to federal funds for the cost of the school breakfast and lunch program by participating in one several identified federal programs so as to obtain federal funds to partially offset the costs of providing the breakfasts and lunches.

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