

May 30, 2023

Take Action Today Support Rule of 90 – Pension Eligibility

The RIFTHP priority to improve the pension plan for active teachers, state workers and municipal workers is legislation called the Rule of 90. The normal retirement age is now a person's social security age (age 67 for most employees). Since 2015, employees can retire if their age plus years of service equals 95, with a minimum age of 62. This is known as the Rule of 95. Legislation has been introduced to change the Rule of 95 to a Rule of 90, where a person age 60 with at least 30 years of service can retire without penalty.

You are encouraged to reach out to your Senator and Representative to ask them to support pension improvement for teachers, state workers and municipal employees by supporting [H 5092](#) by Representative Deborah Fellela and [S 86](#) by Senator Ciccone.

[Click here](#) to view a one-page fact sheet on the legislation.

[Click here](#) to email your Senator and Representative. Please consider sending an email even if the rule of 90 does not affect you or if you are decades away from retirement. After years of pension cuts, we must all work together to make public employee pensions better.

Vision Services Funding

On Wednesday, May 24, the House Finance Committee heard testimony on [H 6389](#) by Representative Casimiro. The bill would allocate \$3 million for the Rhode Island Vision Services Program (RIVESP). The RIFTHP represents the state-employed teachers in the program which is housed at the Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College. The program was endangered several years ago. A joint House/Senate Study Commission met over the last two years and has recommended the \$3 million funding.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified and offered a [letter](#) of support for the appropriation. He thanked legislative leaders for preserving the RIVESP program while interested parties figured out a funding system for the program. He testified about the importance of the program and the necessity for state funding, similar to the system of funding the School for the Deaf Students, parents, teachers and other supporters also testified in support of the appropriation.

Energy-Efficient School Construction

The RIFTHP offered written testimony in support of legislation by Senate Majority Leader Ryan Pearson to provide funding and enact requirements to get schools to be carbon free by 2035. [H 537](#) was heard in the

Senate Finance Committee on May 25. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn provided written support for the bill. In his [letter](#), Flynn noted that this is an opportune time to adopt the carbon-free requirements as so many districts are undergoing school renovation and construction. He lauded the bill's provision that provide a funding incentive from the State that would support energy efficiency in ongoing school renovation projects.

Enacted

The following bills have been approved by the Senate, House and Governor and are now law:

State Worker Abortion Coverage

[H 5006](#), which was introduced by Representative Kazarian, passed the House on 4/27/2023 by a 49 to 24 vote and passed the Senate in concurrence on 5/18/2023 by a vote of 24 to 13.

[S 32](#), which was introduced by Senator Valverde, passed the Senate on 5/18/2023 by a 46 to 20 vote and passed the House in concurrence on 5/18/2023 by a vote of 16 to 49.

Both bills were signed by the Governor on 5/18/2023 and became law. This law would provide for abortion coverage in the Medicaid program and repeal the abortion coverage exclusion for state employee insurance plans.

Teacher Post-Retirement Employment - 120 Days

[H 5040 A](#), which was introduced by Representative O'Brien, passed House on 3/21/23 by a 70 to 0 vote and passed the Senate in concurrence on 3/7/2023 by a vote of 37 to 0.

[S 20 A](#), which was introduced by Senator Valverde, passed the Senate on 3/7/2023 by a 37 to 0 vote and passed the House in concurrence on 3/21/2023 by a vote of 71 to 0.

Both bills were signed by the Governor on 3/22/2023 and became law. This law would add a section which allows substitute teachers and post-retirement employees to exceed the ninety (90) day cap on post-retirement employment if certain conditions are met for the 2022-2023 school year and the 2023-2024 school year.

Election Day School Closure - Presidential Primaries

[H 5305](#), which was introduced by Representative Carson, passed the House on 3/7/2023, by a 71 to 0 vote and passed the Senate in concurrence on 4/25/2023 by a vote of 35 to 0.

[S 130](#), which was introduced by Senator Euer, passed the Senate on 3/16/2023 by a 35 to 0 vote and passed the House in concurrence on 4/18/2023 by a vote of 68 to 0.

Both bills were signed by the Governor on 4/25/2023 and became law. This law would mandate that on each primary for election of national convention delegates and elections for presidential preference primaries, that all public elementary and secondary schools be closed.

Bills on the Move

The following bills have passed the Rhode Island Senate and are awaiting action by the House of Representatives

Office Of The Special Education Ombud

[S 63](#), which was introduced by Senator Murray, passed the Senate on 5/23/23 with a vote of 33 yeas, 4 nays, and 0 members not voting.

This bill would establish the office of the Rhode Island ombud for special education, which would serve independent of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, to ensure school districts throughout the state meet the minimum standards required to comply with the individualized education programs for students with disabilities. This bill would also require that families be provided with a method of evaluation for collecting feedback about the level of satisfaction with the special education services and dispute resolution processes available to them.

Right To An Adequate Education

[S 72](#), which was introduced by Senator Picard, passed the Senate on 3/16/23 with a vote of 35 yeas, 0 nays and 3 members not voting.

This amendment to the Constitution of the State, if approved, would provide that it would be the paramount duty of the General Assembly, the Department of Education, and other government agencies to provide Rhode Island residents with equal opportunities to receive an education that is adequate, equitable and meaningful effective January 1, 2025.

K-2 Class Size Reduction

[S 177](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 3/16/23 with a vote of 32 yeas, 3 nays and 3 members not voting.

This bill would mandate that public-school classroom size be limited to twenty (20) students for kindergarten through grade two (2) on or before October 1 of each school year. Exceptions would be made for emergencies, for temporary situations not to exceed three (3) days and for mid-year enrollments when it would be impractical to assign the student to any class except for an existing class of maximum size. The RIFTHP testified in support of the legislation.

Apprenticeship Pathways To Earning A Bachelor's Degree

[S 178](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 4/27/23 with a vote of 36 yeas, 0 nays and 2 members not voting.

This bill would create the Apprenticeship Pathways to Earning a Bachelor's Degree Act, to enable an individual to earn a bachelor's degree at public higher education institutions throughout the state by earning credits through apprenticeships.

Early Learning Hubs

[S 185](#), which was introduced by Senator DiMario, passed the Senate on 5/2/23 with a vote of 33 yeas, 4 nays and 1 member not voting.

This bill would establish "early learning hubs" to serve as an intermediary among hub partners in order to coordinate support for early learning providers in the delivery of early childhood care and education.

Commissioners of Education - Advice and Consent

[S 378](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 5/11/23 with a vote of 37 yeas, 0 nays and 1 member not voting.

This bill would require that the secretary of the executive office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), the Secretary of Commerce of the Commerce Corporation and the Commissioners of Elementary and Secondary Education and Postsecondary Education, and the Secretary of Housing be appointed by the Governor subject to the approval of the senate. Senate approval would also be required for most temporary appointments to these positions. The RIFTHP testified in support of the legislation.

Office Of Early Childhood Development

[S 482](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 5/2/23 with a vote of 32 yeas, 5 nays and 1 member not voting.

This bill would establish the office of early childhood development and learning to manage a statewide early learning system for children from birth through five (5) years of age, ensure the coordination of federal, state and local policies concerning early childhood care and pre-kindergarten education and ensure that all children enter school ready to learn. This bill would further establish the early childhood development and learning council to advise and coordinate with the office of early childhood development and learning. This act would further repeal the applicable statutory laws vesting authority in the Department of Human Services in regard to early childcare and pre-kindergarten and transfer such powers to the office of early childhood development and learning. This bill would further provide for a two hundred fifty thousand dollar (\$250,000) appropriation for contracting with a vendor to consult with the transition working group.

Early Childhood Educator Wage Plan

[S 492](#), which was introduced by Senator Cano, passed the Senate on 5/2/23 with a vote of 37 yeas, 0 nays and 1 member not voting.

This bill would charge the children's cabinet with establishing and annually updating cross departmental compensation benchmarks for early educators. This bill would also charge the children's cabinet and state agencies with developing strategies and estimating costs to improve the compensation of Early Childhood Educators in order that publicly funded early childhood programs can attract and retain a qualified workforce. This bill would further direct the department of Human Services to implement a pilot program to provide regular wage supplements to child care educators with a focus on attracting and retaining a qualified workforce to provide high-quality infant and toddler care. Additionally, this bill would direct the Department of Human Services to implement an early educator registry that meets national standards and produce annual Early Educator Workforce reports with information from the registry about the characteristics of early educators, staffing trends, and staff turnover levels statewide.

Bill Introductions

\$4 Million - Out-Of-School Time

([S 861](#), Cano, Senate Finance)

([H 5520](#), Casimiro, House Finance)

These bills would provide four million dollars (\$4,000,000) to support comprehensive and effective afterschool, school vacation, summer learning and workforce development programs for students in grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12), and requires an annual report to the general assembly and the governor on the status and progress of the program.

School Social Worker and Psychologist Medicaid Reimbursement

([S 869](#), Cano, Senate Health & Human Services)

([H 5010](#), McNamara, Senate Health & Human Services)

These bills would require that services provided by school social workers and certified school psychologists be included as health care related services eligible for Federal Medicaid reimbursement. **Gun Sales –**

Proximity to Schools

([S 929](#), LaMountain, Senate Judiciary)

([H 5891](#), Knight, House Judiciary)

These bills would prohibit the sale of firearms by a dealer within five hundred feet (500') of a school or daycare center. Existing gun dealers with established business locations as of July 1, 2023 would be grandfathered.

School Disclosure - Gender Identity

([S 957](#), Morgan, Senate Judiciary)

This bill would require a public school, including a charter school, to notify the parent of an unemancipated minor, if the student: (1) Makes a certain disclosure concerning the student's gender identity or gender expression to an employee or staff member of the school; or (2) Changes, expresses a desire to change, or makes a request to change the student's name, attire, or pronoun, title, or word to identify the student, in a manner that is inconsistent with the student's biological sex at birth. This bill would also require an employee or staff member of a school to report the disclosure or information.

\$3,000,000 To RIC - RIVESP

([S 984](#), Lawson, Senate Finance)

([H 6389](#), Casimiro, House Finance)

These resolutions would authorize the appropriation of the sum of \$3,000,000 to Rhode Island College for the Rhode Island Vision Education and Services Program.

\$4 Million - Opportunities In Out-Of-School Time

([S 987](#), Cano, Senate Finance)

This bill would provide four million dollars (\$4,000,000) to support comprehensive and effective before school, afterschool, school vacation, and summer learning for students in grades pre-kindergarten through twelve (PK-12), provide workforce development for individuals seeking to become youth development professionals, provide retention programs for current youth development programs and requires an annual report to the general assembly and the governor on the status and progress of the program.

Teacher and State Retirees - 3% Stipend

([S 996](#), Gallo, Senate 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 the thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) of the member's retirement allowance.

Retirement System - Contributions - Vacant State Positions

([S 997](#), Ciccone, Senate Finance)

This bill would provide that vacancies in excess of three percent (3%) for full-time equivalent state employees which are substituted with contract employees shall require an appropriation to the pension fund equal to the average annual employer contribution for each vacant position.

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