

March 27, 2023

### **DSP Pay Increase**

On Tuesday, March 21, 2023, Center Employee Union Vice-President Anna Landolfi and RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of a \$31 million increase in state funding to support a significant pay increase for Direct Support Professionals. Landolfi has worked at the J Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center as a DSP for decades. The testimony was offered in the House Finance Committee that was hearing the FY 2024 Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH) budget.

Landolfi testified that while the last few pay raises have been important to staff, there are still critical staff shortages that impact the Center's ability to provide quality services to those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She voiced particular concern as seasoned veteran DSPs are leaving the agencies and how that impacts services. Parisi thanked the Assembly for past support of pay increases and noted that more funding is necessary to stabilize the workforce. The Senate Finance Committee will be hearing the BHDDH budget on Tuesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Teacher Post-Retirement Employment**

On Tuesday, March 21, 2023, the House passed teacher post-retirement employment legislation to expand the ability of retirees to work as teachers without loss of pension benefits. [H 5040A](#) and [S 20A](#) passed the House unanimously and were signed into law by Governor McKee on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. The bills permit retirees to work up to a full school year this school year and for the 2023-2024 school year. At the urging of the RIFTHP, the bills require that school districts make an effort to hire non-retirees before placing a retiree in a position.

### **All-Charter School Districts**

On Wednesday, March 21, 2023, the RIFTHP provided written testimony in opposition to legislation by Representative Place to permit cities and towns to characterize their entire school district. [H 5775](#) was heard in the House Education Committee. The bill sponsor did not testify on the bill and there were no witnesses in support of the legislation. In our letter, ([click here](#)) the RIFTHP objected to diminishing public oversight and democratic governance of public schools. The RIFTHP objected to public schools being run by privately-operated unelected charter school Boards. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

### **Resolution on Providence School Closures**

A number of parents and community members turned out in force to support a resolution by Representative Sanchez to oppose the school closures of Broad Street Elementary, Carl Lauro Elementary and Gilbert Stuart Middle School. [H 5170](#) was the last bill heard in the House Education Committee hearing on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. The legislation was a resolution that would not immediately stop the decision.

Jeremy Sencer and several Providence Teachers Union members testified along with students and parents from Broad Street. They testified that the closure decision was made without any public input or parental knowledge. They also provided testimony revealing that Providence Public Schools purposefully underfunded school renovations prior to deciding to close the schools. One of the reasons cited for the school closure is enrollment decline caused by charter school expansion in the City. The bill was held for further study.

### **Providence Collective Bargaining Agreement Ratification**

Rep. Rebecca Kislak submitted legislation that requires the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to ratify any collective bargaining agreement with the Providence Teachers Union while the school district is under state control. [H 5773](#) was heard in the House Education Committee on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. PTU leader Jeremy Sencer offered brief testimony commenting on the importance of highlighting the K-12 Council's responsibilities under the state takeover law. Numerous critics have noted that while the K-12 Council has obligations under the state takeover statute, the Council has abdicated its responsibility and left the operation and oversight of Providence Schools to the Commissioner of Education.

### **Green and Healthy Schools**

On Tuesday, March 21, 2023 a press conference was held at the State House Library in support of a Climate Jobs RI initiative to get all schools to net zero energy efficiency by 2035. Legislation to place the goal in statute has been introduced by Rep. Arthur Handy ([H 6008](#)) and Senator Ryan Pearson ([S 537](#)). The legislation funds a position at RIDE to oversee the effort and contains enhanced funding for school districts renovating their schools. In order to get more information and sign the petition in support of the legislation, use the following link: <https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/support-rhode-island-green-healthy-schools/>

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## **Bill Introductions**

### **Universal School Breakfast and Lunch**

([H 5639](#), Caldwell, House Education)

This bill would establish a statewide universal school breakfast and lunch program in Rhode Island Public Schools. This 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.

### **Special Education Advisory Committees**

([H 5668](#), Cortvriend, House Education)

([S 0489](#), DiMario, Senate Education)

These bills would require public school districts to take certain actions to promote notice and disseminate information regarding the district's special education local advisory committee.

### **Children With Disabilities - Transition Plans**

([H 5669](#), Casimiro, House Education)

([S 0485](#), Quezada, Senate Education)

These bills would require transition planning for high school students with disabilities, who have a “504” plan, like the transition planning required for high school students with disabilities, who have an individualized education program (IEP).

### **Identity Theft Protection Act Of 2015**

([H 5684](#), Cortvriend, House Innovation, Internet, & Technology)

([S 0425](#), DiPalma, Senate Labor)

These bills would provide identity theft protections by requiring reporting of breaches by certain municipal and state agencies, and would require notice to collective bargaining agents where required and requires an explanation of remediation services. Cybersecurity incidents would be reported to the Rhode Island State Police.

### **Parents Bill of Rights Act**

([H 5688](#), Morgan, House Education)

([S 0414](#), Morgan, Senate Judiciary)

These bills would provide for a parents bill of rights preventing the state or any governmental entity from infringing on the fundamental rights of parents in the upbringing of their children. These bills would spell out the rights of parents with respect to the health, education and welfare of their minor children. Violations of the act would result in civil, criminal and/or administrative penalties.

### **In School Suspension Programs**

([H 5738](#), Morgan, House Education)

This bill would require that schools develop a program for in-school suspension that sets aside and equips a specialized learning area in each school, that is appropriately equipped with individualized, computer-assisted learning modules consistent with the educational level and goals of the student.

### **Curriculum Materials and Teaching Practice Requirements**

([H 5739](#), Morgan, House Education)

This bill would require that both curriculum and teaching practices in Rhode Island schools protect and respect the civil rights of all members of the school community.

### **Right To An Adequate Education**

([H 5771](#), Messier, House State Government & Elections)

([S 0072](#), Picard, Senate Education)

These amendments 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.

### **Low Test Score Public School Choice**

([H 5774](#), Chippendale, House Education)

([S 0497](#), de la Cruz, Senate Education)

These bills would establish the Failing School Choice Act, to permit students at failing schools to enroll in any public school. These bills would also establish the Rhode Island education revitalization fund to provide funding to the school choice program.

### **Charter Public School District**

([H 5775](#), Place, House Education)

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.

### **Bilingual - Dual Language Education**

([H 5777](#), Felix, House Education)

([S 0549](#), Cano, Senate Finance)

These bills would create a new chapter for the support and access to bilingual education. It would create a dual language program fund to be administered by the Department of Education. Local education agencies would be eligible to apply to the department for funding.

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