

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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OVERSIGHT OF PROVIDENCE SCHOOL TAKEOVER

On Monday, May 2, the Senate Government Oversight Committee held a five-hour hearing on the Providence School State Takeover. Chaired by Senator Lou DiPalma, the Committee plans to hold hearings on Providence schools every three months. Commissioner Infante-Green, Superintendent Montanez, and other school administrators answered questions from the committee for several hours before public testimony began. Providence Teachers Union President Maribeth Calabro and numerous PTU members testified during the lengthy hearing Monday night. Among the issues raised during the hearing were Providence's grading policy, the summer learning student recruitment memo, teacher vacancies and turnover, and exit interviews of departing teachers. Compelling public testimony was provided by several Providence teachers which refuted the testimony of the RIDE staff and Providence School Administrators. Several parents also spoke voicing both support and opposition to state of the turnaround plan. The next hearing will be held in August.

HOPE SCHOLARSHIP LEGISLATION AT RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals testified in support of legislation by Representative Gregg Amore to establish a two-year scholarship for Rhode Island College students who meet certain requirements. The Hope Scholarship program is modelled after the RI Promise program currently in place for CCRI students. The bill, [H7636](#), was heard in the House Finance Committee on Wednesday, May 4. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill and also submitted a [letter](#) of support. In his testimony, Parisi emphasized that the bill would benefit RIC by offering some stability in enrollment and funding. He also supported the benefits to students in the form of additional scholarship aid and lessened dependency on student loan debt. Also testifying in support of the bill was Rhode Island College President Frank Sanchez and Postsecondary Commissioner Shannon Gilkey. URI President Marc Parlange testified against the bill in its current form, objecting to passage of a bill that did not include URI. RIC AFT President Erik Christiansen and COPE Director Tom Schmeling provided [letters](#) in support of the bill.

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL STARTING WAGE

On Wednesday, May 4, the RIFTHP testified in support of legislation by Senator Lou DiPalma that would create a starting wage for Direct Support Professionals who work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The bill, [S2407](#), would create a \$21/hour starting wage that would increase with inflation. The bill also provides an even higher wage based on years of experience.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support for the bill and provided a [letter](#) of support. He urged passage of the bill and thanked Senator DiPalma for addressing the issue of wage compression by recognizing that people with years of experience need to be compensated fairly. Also supporting the legislation was SEIU, a DSP from Blackstone Valley, CPNRI (the advocacy group for IDD Providers) and the RI AFL-CIO.

ARMING CAMPUS POLICE

The RIFTHP provided a letter in opposition to legislation by Senator Frank Ciccone that would arm campus police at Rhode Island's public higher education institutions. The three local AFT unions at Rhode Island College have consistently opposed legislative efforts to arm the campus police force. The RIFTHP [letter](#) in opposition to [S2778](#) was submitted when the bill was heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, May 3.

LIMITATION ON SCOPE OF STATE EMPLOYEE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The RIFTHP gave a letter of opposition to [H7071](#) at the bill hearing in the House Finance Committee on May 5. The bill, introduced by Representative Charlene Lima, would restrict the scope of collective bargaining for state workers by preventing any negotiation or agreement on the payment of a bonus for COVID vaccination. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi's [letter](#) asked the committee to view the bill as something that limits the range of issues labor and management could discuss at the bargaining table. Even though the issue is moot this year, the RIFTHP urged rejection of the legislation that would weaken worker bargaining rights.

PUBLIC SCHOOL DONATION TAX CREDIT

The RIFTHP issued a letter of support to [H7441](#) at the bill's hearing in the House Finance Committee on May 2. The bill would provide a tax credit for businesses that make charitable contribution to public schools for the purpose of improving the facilities. Representative Solomon has introduced the legislation for years. In the [letter](#) of support, the RIFTHP reminded the committee that tax credits are available for private school tuition donations, but not public school donations.

DRUG PREVENTION ADVOCACY

The President and Vice-President of the Rhode Island Alliance of Student Assistance Counselors went to the Statehouse on Wednesday, May 4 for the purpose of advocating for

increased state funding of school drug prevention programs. David Patrone and Kathryn Hamel met with the head of the House Finance subcommittees on Human Services (Alex Marszalkowski) and Education (Gregg Amore) to urge them to address the staffing challenges experienced by the agency that hires student assistance counselors deployed in most Rhode Island secondary schools. Because of the low compensation offered, many recent hires have left the agency for more lucrative positions elsewhere. RIASAC leaders advocated for a 30% funding increase.

BILL INTRODUCTIONS

Parent Access to Education Documents

(S 2441, de la Cruz, Senate Education)

This bill would enable parents and guardians to review public school learning materials in advance and object if they decide that the material is harmful. The act would provide that a parent or guardian may then withdraw his or her student from the activity or class, where the material is used and request an alternative assignment. The act would also require, that in order to ensure the parent's or guardian's rights, every school committee or charter school governing body must disclose on their website a list of the learning materials and activities used for instruction organized by subject area and grade level.

Joint Study Commission on Education Governance

(S 2442, DiPalma, Senate Education)

(H 7784, McNamara, House Education)

These resolutions would create a ten (10) member special joint legislative commission whose purpose would be to review and make recommendations on how to most efficiently and effectively administer the governance of pre-k through sixteen (16) public education systems in the State of Rhode Island, and who would report back to the Senate and the House no later than March 1, 2023, and whose life would expire on July 1, 2023.

Student Success Factor Adjustment

(S 2457, Murray, Senate Finance)

(H 8093, Barros, House Finance)

These bills would provide that in local educational agencies when over forty-five percent (45%) of the children have a family income that is at or below one hundred eighty-five percent (185%) of federal poverty guidelines then the student success factor will be fifty percent (50%) by the core instruction per-pupil amount.

Home Care Nursing Assistants

(S 2464, Felag, Senate Health & Human Services)

This bill would establish the position of home care nursing assistants, who are paraprofessionals licensed by the Department of Health to work exclusively in home care; would require training specific to home-based care for vulnerable homebound patients; and would allow greater opportunities for home care agencies to compete in the labor

market in order to reduce long wait lists for activities of daily living services and supports at home.

Home Care Moratorium

(S 2465, Felag, Senate Health & Human Services)

This bill would impose a moratorium on the issuance of new home care provider, home nursing care provider and hospice provider licenses prior to July 1, 2027 and provide for health systems planning specific to home care provider, home nursing care provider and hospice provider licenses during the moratorium by the Department of Health.

Workplace Bullying

(S 2486, Ciccone, Senate Labor)

(H 8195, Henries, House Labor)

These bills would establish the Dignity at Work Act, to provide workers with more protection from bullying and harassment in the workplace.

Gender Identity - School Sports

(S 2501, Morgan, Senate Judiciary)

This bill would categorize women by their biological identity at birth rather than their gender identity for purpose of organized sports. A team must be categorized as males, men, or boys; females, women, or girls; or coed or mixed. If there is a dispute a student may establish sex by presenting a signed physician's statement that shall indicate the student's sex. Additionally, this bill would create a cause of action for any student who is deprived of an athletic opportunity or subject to retaliation as a result of this chapter.

Parents Bill Of Rights Act

(S 2516, Morgan, Senate Judiciary)

(H 7138, Morgan, House 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 these acts would result in civil, criminal and/or administrative penalties.

School Employee Assault

(S 2525, Lombardi, Senate Judiciary)

(H 7303, Craven, House Judiciary)

These bills would provide immunity from liability for school employees whose position involves work with students for accidental injury or damage. The bill further provides compensation for certain injuries received by school employees whose position involves work with students.

Trauma Informed Schools Act

(S 2528, Cano, Senate Judiciary)

(H 6667, Ranglin-Vassell, House Education)

These bills would establish the implementation of trauma-informed practices in schools throughout the state.

Students in DCYF Care - Education Team

(S 2545, Kallman, Senate Education)

This bill would require that each child under the supervision of the Department of Children, Youth and Families be provided a team of educational advocates to ensure the child's educational planning, progress and success.



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