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*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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**February 26, 2021**

## **House Education Bills Heard**

On Wednesday, February 24, 2021, the House Education Committee took testimony on a number of bills. The committee, as with all other House and Senate Committees, has meetings that are not open to the public. Individuals who want to testify on bills can either submit written testimony or testify through a phone call.

The RIFTHP offered letters on two bills considered by the House Education Committee. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted written testimony ([click here](#)) in support of [H5238](#). The bill would preserve in state law existing policy that allows Rhode Island residents and high school graduates who are not US citizens to pay in-state tuition at RIC, URI, and CCRI. Testimony at the hearing indicated that there are 76 individuals who currently benefit from this policy by paying the in-state rate instead of the higher out-of-state rate for tuition. The ACLU and RI Kids Count also offered testimony in support of the bill.

In his testimony, Parisi noted that the RIFTHP and the AFT have supported this policy for years. Since regulations could be changed at any time, the RIFTHP urged the Committee to adopt the policy as a state law to preserve the benefits of lower tuition for this small group of high school graduates.

The RIFTHP also submitted testimony ([click here](#)) in opposition to legislation by Rep. Diaz that would further restrict school administrators in issuing suspensions. Her bill, [H5234](#), is similar to legislation considered by the House Education Committee two weeks earlier. In his letter, James Parisi pointed out that while the bill restricts issuing school suspensions, it does not require districts to provide alternative education programs or other supports to students. The lack of funding and specialized programs is a major impediment to providing a positive learning environment for all students. Tim Duffy of the RI Association of School Committees also opposed the bill. The bill was supported by the ACLU and RI Kids Count.

## **Direct Care Worker Minimum Wage Bill Considered**

Legislation submitted by Senator Lou DiPalma ([S0271](#)) would establish a minimum wage for certain direct care workers employed by agencies under contract through the state. The direct care worker minimum wage

would be 155% of the state minimum wage. The current RI minimum wage is \$11.50/hour, so the direct care worker minimum wage would be \$17.82/hour should this bill become law. The RIFTHP represents workers at the J Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center who would be impacted by the bill. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted testimony ([click here](#)) in support of the bill when it was heard in the Senate Labor Committee on February 24<sup>th</sup>. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

### **Substance Abuse Prevention Funding Topic of Hearing**

On Tuesday, February 23, 2021, the RIFTHP offered testimony in support of a bill that would generate funding for school substance abuse prevention programs by increasing fines for those convicted of driving under the influence or refusing to take a breathalyzer test. The bill, [H5471](#), was heard in the House Judiciary Committee. The RIFTHP testimony ([click here](#)) noted that the state has not increased funding for substance abuse prevention programs for two decades, and any supplemental funding stream would benefit our state. The ACLU and the Public Defenders office opposed the bill, not wanted to fund programs through increased fines of those convicted of crimes. The bill was held for further study.

### **In the News This Week**

To view the Sunday, February 21 , 2021 story in the Providence Journal that featured comments by visiting nurse and union leader of FNHP Local 5022 Melanie Gambardella in support of workers compensation legislation, [click here](#).

To view the Wednesday, February 24, 2021 commentary in the Providence Journal by Providence Teachers Union President Maribeth Calabro related to giving the COVID-19 vaccine to teachers and communities of color, [click here](#).

To view the Thursday, February 25, 2021 commentary in the Providence Journal by Senators Sandra Cano and Ana Quezada in support of charter school moratorium legislation, [click here](#).

To view a recording of the press conference by the Revenue for RI coalition, which includes the RIFTHP, announcing legislation to raise revenue by increasing taxes on income over \$475,000, [click here](#).

### **Commissioner Appointment Legislation Hearing Scheduled**

On Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, the RIFTHP will be providing testimony in support of [H5423](#). The bill, introduced by Rep. William O'Brien, would provide that future Commissioners of Postsecondary Education and

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education would go through the Senate's Advice and Consent process prior to being appointed. The bill would make these positions appointments by the Governor, not the Board of Education. The legislation mirrors a bill by Senator Gallo, [S0063](#), which has already passed the Senate. The RIFTHP written testimony has already been submitted to the House State Government and Elections Committee and can be viewed [here](#).

### **Tuesday March 2nd is Election Day**

Tuesday, March 2, 2021 is Election Day in Rhode Island. Seven bond questions are before the voters and are being considered in this special election. The labor movement supports all bond questions. The RIFTHP has prioritized Question 1, which would provide funding for the renovation of the Clarke Science Building on the Rhode Island College campus. Polls close at 8:00 PM.

### **BILL INTRODUCTIONS**

#### **Higher Education - Alternative Pathways through Apprenticeships**

([S0213](#) Gallo, Senate Education)

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.

#### **Basic Education Plan Review Process**

([S0214](#) Cano, Senate Education)

This bill would require that every two years, the Rhode Island Department of Education will review and consider revisions to the Basic Education Plan, the regulations governing K-12 education. The review would contain a fiscal analysis of meeting regulatory requirements.

#### **School Social Worker Minimum Staffing**

([S0217](#) Sosnowski, Senate Education)

This bill would require all public schools in grades kindergarten through twelve (12), to have at least one full-time certified school social worker for every four hundred (400) students.

#### **Minimum Wage - Direct Care Workers**

([S0271](#) DiPalma, Senate Labor)

This bill would require state contracted human services providers to pay their employees a starting hourly wage of no less than one hundred fifty-five percent (155%) of the state minimum wage.

### **Anti-Littering Education Study Commission**

[\(H5349\)](#) *Messier, House Education*)

This resolution would create a nine (9) member special legislative commission whose purpose it would be to study and make recommendations for the development and implementation of an anti-littering education program for elementary students in Rhode Island's public schools, and who would report back to the House of Representatives on or before February 3, 2022. The Commission would include a RIFTHP designee.

### **Seizure Safe Schools Act**

[\(H5351\)](#) *Cortvriend, House Education*)

This bill would require all elementary and secondary schools to have at least one school employee trained to administer or assist with the self-administering of seizure rescue medication prescribed to treat seizure disorder systems and the use of prescribed electrical stimulation and would also establish guidelines to authorize the administering of seizure medication in school.

### **Special Education Advisory Committee**

[\(H5352\)](#) *Cortvriend, House Education*)

This bill would require screening for dyslexia and related disorders for public school students in grades kindergarten through grade four (K-4) and would provide for instruction in cursive writing.

### **IEP services - Homeschooled Students**

[\(H5315\)](#) *Cortvriend, House Education*)

This bill would create a local advisory committee on special education in every school district to advise the school district on matters concerning the unmet needs of students with disabilities, comment on improvement plans including school support plans resulting from the federal Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) Part B compliance reports, local compliance with state and federal laws pertaining to the education of students with disabilities, comment on applications for federal and state funds and serve as advocates in partnership with parents, guardians or caretakers of students with disabilities to ensure that they receive the entitlements provided to them under state and federal laws. The majority of the committee would be comprised of parents, guardians or caretakers of students with disabilities.

### **Required Suicide Prevention Training - Suicide Prevention Policy**

[\(H5353\)](#) *Cortvriend, House Education*)

[\(S0031\)](#) *Seveney, Senate Education*)

This bill would create the "Nathan Bruno and Jason Flatt Act" which would require training of teachers, students and all school personnel regarding suicide awareness and prevention. The bill would also require districts to adopt suicide prevention policies.

### **Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights**

[\(H5354\)](#) *O'Brien, House Education*)

This bill would create the anti-bullying bill of rights act which would strengthen protection for students in

schools who are victims of bullying. It would require more enhanced teacher and administrator training to better understand and combat the effects of bullying. It would provide for collaboration between the department of education, attorney general and state police to establish strict policies and procedures on how to handle a reported situation of bullying.

### **Teacher Bill of Rights**

([H5355](#) O'Brien, House Education)

This bill would broaden the definition of "teacher" and create a comprehensive bill of rights for school teachers.

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