
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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RIFTHP Opposes 2021 RICAS Test Administration

In a letter to Commissioner Infante Green ([click here](#)), RIFTHP President Frank Flynn objected to her decision to administer standardized tests to Rhode Island students this spring. Flynn sent the letter on March 17, 2021 asking her to reconsider her decision. In his letter, he wrote “On behalf of the eight thousand educator members of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers, I am writing to ask you to reconsider your current stance on administering the RICAS Assessment at this time. Your insistence on administering standardized testing this spring is educationally indefensible and may deepen the trauma thousands of Rhode Island’s children have experienced during the pandemic. This decision places an obsession with standardized test scores ahead of the immediate needs of our students.”

Firearms on School Grounds

The RIFTHP offered written testimony in support of legislation that would close a loophole in Rhode Island law that allows individuals with concealed carry permits for firearms to bring guns on school grounds. The bill, [H5555](#) by Representative Kazarian, was heard in the House Judiciary Committee on March 19th. The RIFTHP has supported this legislation for years.

In his letter ([click here](#)), RIFTHP President Frank Flynn offered support for the bill. He noted that teachers want safe work environments for themselves and safe learning environments for students. He wrote “We cannot fathom any situation where it would be acceptable or advisable for a visitor to conceal a firearm while in a school building or on school grounds. Rhode Island public schools are generally safe learning environments for students. Any measure that enhances safer schools for students and safer workplaces for teachers and school support staff should be approved.”

In addition to his written testimony, Flynn supplied the House Judiciary Committee with a 2018 RIFTHP convention Resolution on school safety which is attached to the letter.

Higher Education Bills on the Docket

Two bills related to public higher education were heard in the Assembly this week, the first was introduced at the request of outgoing Governor Gina Raimondo by Senate President Ruggerio, [S0079](#). The bill would eliminate the sunset clause of the RI Promise Scholarship program and make it permanent. Identical legislation has been introduced by Speaker of the House Shekarchi.

The legislation was heard by the Senate Education Committee on March 17th. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn offered support for maintaining the RI Promise program at CCRI with a significant caveat. In his written testimony ([click here](#)), Flynn noted the impact the scholarship program at CCRI has had on Rhode Island College enrollment and budget. He asked the Assembly to extend the program to Rhode Island College students as a necessary next step in keeping the RI Promise program.

On Friday, March 19th the House Judiciary Committee heard testimony on the second piece of legislation, this one introduced by Representative O'Brien, [H5395](#) to arm campus police at Rhode Island public higher education institutions. On behalf of the three bargaining units at RIC, the RIFTHP offered written testimony against the bill ([click here](#)).

House Education Legislation Heard

On Wednesday, March 17th, the House Education Committee heard testimony on several bills of interest to RIFTHP members. The RIFTHP offered written testimony ([click here](#)) in opposition to [H5235](#) by Representative Diaz. Her bill would allow school districts to hire Licensed Practical Nurses to work in schools. In his testimony, RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi raised concerns about lowering the professional standards of individuals providing health services to public school students. Deborah Svitil, speaking for the Rhode Island Certified School Nurse Teacher organization and a Cranston Teachers' alliance member, offered testimony against the bill.

The RIFTHP also offered testimony in opposition to [H5701](#) and [H5713](#), identical bills that would require mandatory emergency care training for 80% of Rhode Island public school teachers over a three year period. The RIFTHP voiced support for such training being offered but questioned the need to make it a requirement of most public school teachers. In written testimony against the bills ([click here](#)), RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi noted that there has not been state funding for teacher professional development for over a decade. The RIFTHP encouraged efforts to create a statewide training program that districts could offer to staff without making the training a mandatory requirement of teachers.

Charter Moratorium Hearing Scheduled

House Finance Committee is will be holding a hearing on ([H5193](#)) today. The charter school moratorium legislation, introduced by Representative O'Brien, is the top legislative priority this session for the RIFTHP. The Senate has already passed the legislation by an overwhelming vote last month.

BILL INTRODUCTIONS

Providence - Elected School Committee

([H5516](#) *Perez, House Education*)

This bill would authorize the city of Providence to have an elected school committee, as opposed to an appointed school board, effective July 1, 2025. This act would take effect only upon approval of this act by a majority of the qualified electors of the said city of Providence voting at a general or special election, which election, if held, would be held prior to July 1, 2025.

Computer Science Graduation Requirement

([H5517](#) *Tobon, House Education*)

This bill would require that commencing with the graduating class of 2023, all high school students attending public schools demonstrate proficiency in computer science.

School - Annual Indoor Air Quality Testing

([H5518](#) *Kislak, House Education*)

([S0030](#) *Goldin, Senate Education*)

These bills would require the Department of Health, in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Management, to conduct indoor and outdoor air quality tests in all public and private schools throughout the state, on an annual basis.

Education - Mandatory Community Service

([H5519](#) *Tobon, House Education*)

This bill would require all students in kindergarten to grade twelve (K-12) to perform a minimum amount of community service each school year and would grant them the option to perform certain forms of community service for academic credit. This act would take effect on July 1, 2022.

School Curriculum Materials - Mental Health

([H5520](#) *Lombardi, House Education*)

This bill would require the department of education to develop and make available for school use a mental health curriculum. Schools would be required to provide four (4) hours of mental health instruction to seventh grade students.

Advanced Placement Classes - College Credit - Public Higher Education

([H5522](#) *Amore, House Education*)

This bill would establish a process for the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island to accept for college credit an advanced placement subject test score of three (3) ("qualified") or better in an advanced placement course.

Curriculum - Sex Education

([H5604](#) *Kislak, House Education*)

This bill would amend the current law so that courses in family life or sex education would be taught in grades six through twelve and would be appropriate for students of all races, genders, sexual orientations, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Teachings would recognize pleasure based sexual relations, different sexual orientations and be inclusive of same-sex relationships. The act would also provide that instruction include gender, gender expression, gender identity, and the harm of negative gender stereotypes.

Student Work Permit - Worker Rights Education

([H5619](#) *Noret, House Labor*)

This bill would require children who seek a special limited work permit to successfully complete a training program which shall address workers' rights, workplace health and safety, and workers' compensation, to be established and funded by the department of labor and training.

Curriculum - Climate Change Education

([H5625](#) *Cortvriend, House Education*)

([S0464](#) *Lawson, Senate Education*)

These bills would implement literacy of climate change for all students enrolled in public schools or other schools managed and controlled by the state in kindergarten through twelve (K-12).

Teacher, State Worker, Municipal Worker Pension Eligibility

([H5668](#) *Fellela, House Finance*)

This bill would allow teachers, state and municipal employees to retire upon the earlier of reaching age sixty (60) with thirty (30) years of service or the employee's retirement eligibility date under present state statutes.

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