

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Vision Services Parents, Teachers Rally at Statehouse

Parents of Blind and Visually Impaired Students held a rally in support of saving the vision education program in front of Veterans Memorial Auditorium, where the House of Representatives has been holding its sessions this year. Over 75 parents, teachers, and supporters gathered to protest the Commissioner of Education's decision to put the vision program out to bid. All vision educators have been given layoff notices as a result of RIDE action.

Numerous Representatives, including House Speaker Shekarchi, stopped by to greet the parents and teachers. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn is working with Rhode Island College President Frank Sanchez (the program is housed at the Sherlock Center on the RIC campus), RIDE and legislators to fix the problem caused by RIDE's decision to put the program out to bid.



Certified School Nurse Teacher Bill Advances

The Senate Education took testimony on two bills related to Certified School Nurse Teachers (CSNT) during an extensive hearing on Wednesday April 14. [S0087](#) by Senator Frank Ciccone would explicitly require utilizing a CSNT to run school health programs. Testimony was also offered on [S0791](#) by Senator Maryellen

Goodwin. S0791 would require regulations governing the operation of school health clinics including a requirement that clinics would be staffed by Certified School Nurse Teachers. RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi wrote a letter in support of S0087 ([click here](#)) and spoke in support of S0791 in the hearing.

Among the points he made in support of the legislation were:

- School health centers should have specialists who have considerable demonstrated knowledge of education health policy that is gained through becoming a CSNT. Preserving the requirement that school health programs are staffed by CSNT is vitally important.
- The Assembly should act to ensure that those who meet a high standard of nurse preparation work in school-based health centers.
- School Health Centers should be considered in our public schools, but not as a vehicle to replace certified school nurse teachers.
- We must be careful of letting the profit-motive enter our public-school buildings.

Providence Teaches Union President Maribeth Calabro testified in support of both bills. She recounted the recent story in Providence where two certified school nurse teachers were displaced from their jobs in order to accommodate a new student clinic, known as SMART Clinics. She testified that school nurses are a first line of defense against student crises and are integral to the teaching faculty. She also warned the Committee that the clinic was using student data for its own research purposes. Deb Svitil and Linda Twardowski of the RI Certified School Nurse Teacher Association and the CSNTs from Providence also testified in support of the bill. Tim Ryan representing school Superintendents opposed the bill. The Committee held S0791 for further study and voted to approve S0087 on a unanimous vote.

[Click here](#) to link to a UpriseRI article about the privatization of school health services in Providence.

School Safety Bill Heard

The Senate Judiciary Committee received testimony on a bill by Senate President Dominick Ruggerio that would prohibit those with a concealed carry permit to bring firearms on school grounds. The bill, [S0073](#), was heard on Monday April 12th. The RIFTHP provided written testimony in support of the bill. In his letter, RIFTHP President Frank Flynn noted that guns are not allowed in courthouses or the statehouse, and they should not be permitted in a schoolhouse. To view Flynn's testimony, [click here](#). The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

RIFTHP Supports Climate Literacy

The RIFTHP testified in support of Senator Valarie Lawson's bill, [S0464](#). In the Senate Education Committee on April 14th. James Parisi supported the concept of convening a group of stakeholders to infuse climate-

related principles in science, civics and social studies curricula currently being developed at RIDE. Parisi testified that the legislation is timely, as now is the opportunity to influence curricula and curricular materials being developed by RIDE in response to major curriculum legislation enacted in 2019. A large number of environmental organizations and others also testified in support of the bill, which was held for further study.

State Support for Mental and Behavioral Health

During the Senate Education Committee hearing on April 14, the RIFTH provided testimony in support of a bill by Senate Education Chair Sandra Cano ([S0757](#)) that would create minimum staffing standards for certain positions. The bill would:

- Provide for three years of funding to school districts to be used to cover fifty percent of the costs of hiring school psychologists, social workers, and counselors.
- Require schools accessing these funds to meet the staffing ratios
 - social workers - one per 400 students
 - school psychologists – one per 700 students
 - school counselors – one per 250 students
- State funding could not be used to supplant existing mental and behavioral health staff.
- Requires an annual report by RIDE on numbers of behavioral and mental health staff employed by each local education agency.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill, noting that an excellent use of limited time federal funding would be to hire staff to address the social and emotional needs of students as we emerge from the pandemic.

The RIFTHP also signaled support for a related bill, [S0217](#) by Senator Sosnowski, that would enact a staffing ratio for school social workers.

Opposition Voiced to Mandatory Training

The RIFTHP provided written testimony in opposition to [S0701](#), a bill introduced by Senator Archambault. The bill would require that 80% of all teachers get training in emergency first aid. The RIFTHP supported the idea of school districts providing first aid training to staff but objected to the mandate that most teachers get the training. To view a copy of the RIFTHP letter, [click here](#)..

BILL INTRODUCTIONS

Divestment of State Pension Funds - Military Contractors

([S0578](#) *Mack, Senate Finance*)

([H6026](#) *Morales, House Finance*)

These bills would require the state investment commission to identify and divest pension fund investments in military weapon manufacturers whether held directly and indirectly with certain exceptions and would also require the state investment commission to provide an annual written report to the attorney general, the house, and the senate.

Local School Aid Maintenance of Effort

([S0585](#) *Raptakis, Senate Finance*)

This bill would provide that in determining local school aid, the state would annually provide each community no less than an amount equal to the aid given in the preceding fiscal year.

Pension COLA - 25% Annual Payment

([S0586](#) *Sosnowski, Senate Finance*)

([H5679](#) *McEntee, House Finance*)

These bills would replace the current COLA suspension schedule effective January 1, 2022, with a fractional annual COLA of twenty-five percent (25%) of the COLA declared for that plan year, as it pertains to retired teachers, state and municipal employees.

Charter School Funding - PPP Offset

([S0587](#) *Pearson, Senate Finance*)

This bill would readjust local aid to charter schools that received any Paycheck Protection Program funds created by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act by multiplying the ratio of funds paid to the sending district divided by the total funds received from all sending school districts. The reduction calculated shall be allocated equally against the payments due from the sending district to the charter public school during the remainder of FY2021 and for each payment due in FY2022.

School Contract Employee Work Year

([S0635](#) *Lawson, Senate Education*)

([H6118](#) *Amore, House Education*)

These bills would prohibit school committees from negotiating, extending, or renewing any public transportation service contract unless the contract provides for payments to school bus drivers, attendants, monitors and aids for one hundred and eighty (180) days or the length of the contracted-for school year, whichever is longer and requires the public transportation service provider to utilize the Real Jobs RI driver training program to attract, train and retain its drivers.

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