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*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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April 23, 2021

## Spring Break

The Rhode Island General Assembly did not meet this past week, as they traditionally do not meet during the February and April school vacation weeks. The House and Senate will meet next Tuesday, and Committees will hold hearings next week. This edition of the Smith Hill Report contains testimony from the prior week.

## Charter School Overfunding Addressed

The Senate Finance Committee hearing on legislation related to charter school over-funding was continued from April 8<sup>th</sup> to a following week's hearing on April 15<sup>th</sup>. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn wrote a letter ([click here](#)) in support of the funding bill. The legislation, [S0587](#), would lower funding of charter schools by the amount of the federal Paycheck Protection Program loans available for businesses during the pandemic that charter schools applied for and were awarded. Several charter schools received millions of dollars in federal PPP loans, which are forgivable, even though they suffered no loss of funding due to the pandemic. Senator Pearson's bill would lower state and local funding by the amount of the PPP loan.

## Student Assistance Program Funding Legislation Heard

The Senate Health and Service Committee heard testimony on April 15 related to the funding of Student Assistance programs. The bill, [S0048](#) would direct that money collected by the state for those in violation of the State's marijuana laws would be used to fund drug prevention programs in public schools. The RIFTHP offered written support of the bill. In his letter ([click here](#)), RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi informed the Committee that state funding has not increased for student assistance programs for over twenty years. While the state needs to identify a revenue source to increase funding, such supplemental funding ideas such as the re-direction of civil marijuana fines, makes sense. The Committee approved the bill on a unanimous vote, and it will be considered on the Senate floor next week.

### **Additional RIFTHP Written Testimony Offered**

The RIFTHP wrote a letter in support of legislation related to **Student Access to the Internet**. The legislation would require direct Districts to provide high speed internet access to all students. The bill, [H5934](#) by Rep. Ranglin-Vassell, was heard in the House Education Committee on April 14<sup>th</sup>. [click here](#) to view the RIFTHP letter in support of the bill.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn wrote a letter in support of legislation to require annual testing of **Air Quality in Schools**. The bill, [H5935](#) was also sponsored by Representative Ranglin-Vassell, a Providence Teachers Union member. To view Flynn's letter, [click here](#).

The RIFTHP wrote a letter opposing a bill by Senator Paolino to **Record Meetings Closed to the Public**. His bill, [S0512](#), was heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday April 15<sup>th</sup>. To view the RIFTHP testimony against the bill, [click here](#).

### **BILLS ON THE MOVE**

The following is a list of bills that have been passed by one chamber and has been referred to the other for approval.

#### **Charter School Expansion Moratorium**

[S0013A](#), which was introduced by Senator Goodwin, passed the Senate on 2/20/2021 with a vote of 34 yeas, 0 nays, and 4 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Finance Committee.

This act would provide that the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education would not grant preliminary or final approval for the creation or expansion of any district, independent, or mayoral academy charter school to begin operation in the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, or 2023-2024 school years. The act would also provide that the state would not approve or appropriate funding to any new charter school or expand an existing charter school that had not been approved by the council prior to July 1, 2020, for the fiscal years 2022, 2023, and 2024.

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

[S0031](#), which was introduced by Senator Seveney, passed the Senate on 4/13/2021 with a vote of 35 yeas, 0 nays, and 3 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Education Committee.

This act 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, and the establishment of a conflict resolution process between teachers or school personnel and students.

### **Commissioner of Education - Gubernatorial Appointment**

[S0063aa](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 2/10/2021 with a vote of 36 yeas, 0 nays, and 2 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House State Government & Elections Committee.

This act would require that the secretary of the executive office of health and human services (EOHHS), the secretary of commerce of the commerce corporation and the commissioners of elementary and secondary education and postsecondary education be appointed subject to the approval of the senate. Senate approval would also be required for most temporary appointments to these positions. This act would take effect on January 1, 2023.

### **Civics Education Graduation Requirement**

[S0076aa](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 3/9/2021 with a vote of 38 yeas, 0 nays, and 0 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Education Committee.

This act would require that commencing with the graduating class of 2022 2023 and all subsequent graduating classes thereafter, all high school students attending public schools shall fulfill at least one-half credit or course requirement in civics education.

### **RI Promise Program Continuation**

[S0079](#), which was introduced by Senate President Ruggiero, passed the Senate on 4/13/2021 with a vote of 33 yeas, 2 nays, and 3 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Finance Committee.

This act would remove the requirement that the scholarship program cease with the enrollment of the high school graduating class of 2021 at the Community College of Rhode Island.

### **Workplace Bullying Protection**

[S0196](#), which was introduced by Senator Ciccone, passed the Senate on 3/9/2021 with a vote of 35 yeas, 3 nays, and 0 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Labor Committee.

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

### **Individual Career and Academic Planning System**

[S0285](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 3/9/2021 with a vote of 30 yeas, 8 nays, and 0 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Education Committee.

This act would implement an individual career and academic plan as a graduation requirement for each student enrolled in public schools in the sixth through twelfth grade, starting with students entering the sixth grade in the 2024-2025 school year. This act would take effect on January 1, 2022.

### **K-2 Class Size Limits**

[S0287](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 4/13/2021 with a vote of 30 yeas, 5 nays, and 3 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Education Committee.

This act would mandate that public school classroom size be limited to twenty (20) students for kindergarten through grade two (2). Exceptions are made for emergencies and temporary situation not to exceed three (3) days and for mid-year enrollments when it would be impractical to assign the student any class but an existing class of maximum size.

### **Consumer Science Curriculum Development**

[S0349](#), which was introduced by Senator Cano, passed the Senate on 4/13/2021 with a vote of 35 yeas, 0 nays, and 3 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House Education Committee.

This act would require the cCouncil on Elementary and Secondary Education, in consultation with the Rhode Island Department of Education, to develop and approve statewide academic standards for the instruction of consumer education in public high schools no later than December 31, 2021.

### **State Employee Cultural Competency Training**

[S0428](#), which was introduced by Senator Cano, passed the Senate on 3/30/2021 with a vote of 33 yeas, 3 nays, and 2 members not voting. This bill has been referred to the House State Government & Elections Committee.

This act would require the Office of Diversity, Equity and Opportunity (ODEO) to create and for all state and municipal employees to receive annual training in cultural competency. It would define "cultural competency" as an understanding of how institutions and individuals can respectfully respond to people from all different backgrounds such as race, language, economic, gender, veterans and disabilities.

### **Student Possession of Sunscreen**

[H5164](#), which was introduced by Representative Bennett, passed the House on 3/9/2021 with a vote of 71 yeas, 0 nays, and 4 members not voting. This bill was referred to the Senate Education Committee.

This act would allow students in public schools to possess and use a topical sunscreen product. Children enrolled in grades K-5 would need a note from a parent or guardian in order to possess sunscreen on school property.

## **BILL INTRODUCTIONS**

### **Rhode Island College Hope Scholarship Program**

([S0636](#) *Pearson, Senate Education*)

([H6217](#) *Amore, House Education*)

These bills would establish the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Act whereby the goal is to increase the number of students enrolling in and obtaining degrees in a timely fashion from Rhode Island college. The Hope Scholarship Act will provide up to the cost of two (2) years of tuition costs and mandatory fees for eligible students.

### **State Funding for Teacher Professional Development**

([S0637](#) *Murray, Senate Education*)

([H5208](#) *Serpa, House Education*)

These bills would restructure the professional development investment fund to assume duties of dissemination of curriculum materials aligned with curriculum frameworks, state assessments, and implement district professional development plans with an allocation of two hundred dollars (\$200) per student.

### **Municipal Worker Binding Arbitration**

([S0687](#) *Lawson, Senate Labor*)

([H5406](#) *Bennett, House Labor*)

These bills would establish new factors for the Interest Contract Arbitration Board for Municipal Employee Unions to consider in rendering a decision, would grant the board power to render an award over all negotiated matters, including the expenditure of money and would provide for a review of the arbitration panel's decision, by writ of certiorari to the supreme court.

### **Mandatory First Aid Training**

([S0701](#) *Archambault, Senate Education*)

([H5701](#) *Casimiro, House Education*)

These bills would require that one third (1/3) of all Rhode Island teachers, for the next three (3) years trained in the basic emergency and response skills curriculum ("BEARS"), specifically in hand-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation, Heimlich maneuver, and bleeding control.

### **Court Operations Administration**

([S0735](#) *Coyne, Senate Judiciary*)

([H5974](#) *Amore, House Judiciary*)

These bills would invest the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court with the explicit authority to address issues affecting the conduct of judicial business and order whatever response(s) he or she deems necessary, in his or her discretion as the executive head of the unified judicial system, to ensure the continued operation of the courts.

## Health Care Worker Hazard Pay

([S0746](#) Mack, Senate Labor)

([H5029](#) Amore, House Judiciary)

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