

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Mayoral Academy Charter School Approval

The RIFTHP testified in support of Representative Peter Palumbo's bill ([H7444](#)) to amend the way mayoral academy charter schools are created. Under current law, a mayor can support a mayoral academy and it can be granted by the Board of Education over the objections of a school committee or city/town council of participating communities. H7444 would give city/town councils and school committees authority to approve or reject mayoral charter school applications.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified that it makes no sense when one branch of city government can support a mayoral charter school but the other branches of government that are responsible for budgets and taxes (councils) and educating children (school committees) are not part of the approval process. He cited the example of the mayor of Cranston supporting the location of a mayoral charter school over the objection of the school committee and council members. Parisi also recalled how a former Board of Regents Chair considered the Board of Regents a 'charter school factory'.

Joining Parisi in supporting the legislation was Tim Ryan, representing school superintendents, and Tim Duffy, representing school committees.

The opposition to the bill came from the usual mayoral charter school supporters in the State. RIDE opposed the bill, telling the Committee that the Board of Education listens to the concerns of all stakeholders. The Rhode Island Mayoral Academy lobbyist Kevin Horan also opposed the bill, expressing satisfaction with the current approval process.

March 24, 2014

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Christine Lopes Metcalfe of RI-CAN, a corporate funded charter school support organization, also opposed the bill.

Just Cause/Right to Rent

On Tuesday, March 18, the Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony on [S2659](#) (Metts), the Landlord and Tenant Act. This legislation, dubbed "Just Cause/Right to Rent" would provide greater protection against eviction for a tenant of a foreclosed property.

The RIFTHP's Director of Political Activities, Maureen Martin, provided written testimony expressing concerns with the negative effects housing foreclosures and the resulting evictions have on students. Martin's letter repeated the RIFTHP's testimony given at several hearings over the last few years, "*A significant proportion of students who make up our woefully high dropout rate are from families who move from district to district, unable to establish a consistent place of residence due to the ongoing state of housing in RI.*"

The legislative battle to protect renters from foreclosure related evictions has been waged by Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) a community group that organizes low-income families for social, economic and political justice. DARE's Tenant and Homeowner Association's organizer, Christopher Rotundo, testified on behalf of the bill. Rotundo highlighted the point that that the legislation was supported not only by the teachers' union but by others in the education community. He noted that the written testimony from the RIFTHP and the RI School Superintendents' Association (RISSA) meant this issue is of concern to educators in RI.

The RISSA written testimony Rotundo referred to was from Executive Director Timothy Ryan and it talked about the bill as a way to establish protection for families, who through no fault of their own, are forced to vacate their rental property. Ryan's letter said "*It is critical that, in our State, our children have the chance for a consistent school placement*".

Testimony in support of the bill was also given by

A forum on holding a Constitutional Convention is being held March 29, 2014 at the Hassenfeld Institute for Public Leadership, Bryant University. To register go to:

[Con Con Registration](#)



AFL-CIO Convention
part 3

Building Futures part 3
- program graduates
and director

LaborVision is seen on Cox
Ch. 14 and FioS Ch. 33

Tuesdays @ 7PM

Thursday @ 8PM

Saturday @ 5PM

representatives of the Service Employees International Union RI State Council, the RI Coalition for the Homeless, the Southeast NE American Friends Service Committee, The Riverwood Housing First, the RI Homeless Advocacy Project and the Olneyville Neighborhood Association as well as Warwick city councilwoman Camille Vella-Wilkinson.

Written testimony in favor of the bill was presented by The George Wiley Center, the Environmental Justice League of RI, the Civil Rights Roundtable and the Childhood Lead Action Project.

A lobbyist for the RI Credit Union Association testified against the bill despite that most of their members would be exempt from the legislation as it is. The RI Mortgage Bankers Association was absent but would be submitting written testimony.

BHDDH Budget

On Thursday, March 13 the House Finance Subcommittee on Human Services heard a presentation of the Governor's FY 2015 Budget for the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH).

RIFTHP's Center Employees Union, Local 3726, President Lewis Kelley and Maureen Martin, RIFTHP Director of Political Activities, were present to testify and to urge the committee to consider ways to increase funding for the developmental disabilities community residential services.

In fiscal 2012, the State slashed the budget for community-based services for disabled adults by \$24.5 million. Since then, \$11.5 M has been restored but more is needed and the funds need to be channeled directly to the wages and support of the direct care service workers.

In her testimony, Martin said that the lack of funding for the developmental disabilities (DD) services provided by private non-profit organizations has resulted in depressed wages for people working in the field. Martin said she agreed with previous speakers who noted that employees who do the same work, but who are employed in the State operated division of DD, are provided with a much healthier salary.

Martin said *"...the State has set a wage standard for these jobs in the way it pays the State side of DD employees but the funding is not adequate on the non-profit side to pay employees adequately."*

Kelly, who was not called upon before the Committee adjourned for the convening of the floor session, submitted his testimony in writing. Kelly was very pointed in his written remarks and said *"the lack of funding for the DD population is disappointing and downright depressing"*. He talked about his agency recently displacing fifteen staff from five homes and how the lack of funding has created an unsafe environment for the people who live and work in the DD homes. Urging the Committee to pass any bills that improve the funding for DD services, Kelly said *"Remember, our DD populations are citizens of Rhode Island as much as any person living in RI. So please do the right thing."*

Others speaking on behalf of more funding for the DD community included Donna Martin, Executive Director of the Community Provider Network of RI and Thomas Kane, President and CEO of AccessPoint RI.

Gubernatorial Candidates Forum

A 2014 Rhode Island Gubernatorial Candidates Forum will be hosted by the Economic Progress Institute on April 7, 2014. This free forum will be held at the Ocean State Theatre, 1245 Jefferson Boulevard, Warwick, RI 02886. It will take place from 5:00PM to 6:30PM. To register, go to: [Gubernatorial Candidates Forum Registration](#). Send a question(s) that you want asked of the candidates to info@economicprogressri.org.

Bill Introductions

If you would like to read the full text of a bill, just click on the bill number.

Adjunct Faculty Medical Benefits

([H7642](#) *Jacquard, House Corporations*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would provide that adjunct faculty members at any State college or university who teach at least 50% of the hours regularly worked by full-time faculty in an academic semester would be eligible for the same State hospital care and surgical-medical service benefit as other state employees.

Standardized Test - Graduation Requirement - Prohibition

([H7672](#) *Naughton, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would direct RIDE to study and implement a State standardized test assessment program over a ten year period commencing on July 1, 2014. This bill would also provide that State assessments would not be used to determine a student's eligibility to be promoted to the next grade and/or to graduate from high school.

Combined Reporting

([H7739](#) *Tanzi, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would address the factors required to be taken into account in determining the taxpayers share of the net business income or loss apportionable to the State of Rhode Island.

Virtual Charter School Moratorium

([H7755](#) *Tanzi, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would define virtual schooling, and impose a three (3) year moratorium on the establishment of charter public schools with virtual schooling components, commencing on July 1, 2014. This moratorium would not apply to charter public schools with virtual schooling components that exist or are approved prior to July 1, 2014.

Teacher Layoff and Termination Notice - June 1

([S2014](#) *DiPalma, Senate Labor*)

The RIFTHP opposes this bill which would amend the notification requirements regarding the dismissal, suspension or lay-off of teachers in the event of a fiscal exigency or program reorganization.

Coming Up

On Tuesday, [March 25](#), at the rise, the House Finance Committee will hear testimony on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education budget. On Wednesday, [March 26](#), at the rise, the Senate Education Committee will hear testimony on [S2059](#) (Standardized Test - Graduation Requirement - 5 Year Moratorium, Satchell), [S2135](#) (Common Core Implementation Commission, Satchell) and [S2185](#) (Standardized Testing Graduation Requirement, Metts). On Thursday, [March 27](#), at the rise, the House Finance Committee will hear testimony on the Public Higher Education budget.



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