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# *The* SMITH HILL REPORT

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## **Local Approval Bill Garners RIFTHP Support**

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in support of Senator Adam Satchell's bill to require local approval prior to the opening of a new charter school. The bill, [S2019](#), was heard at a joint hearing of the Senate Education Committee and the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday, May 3. President Flynn identified this bill as a top RIFTHP priority, particularly after the Board of Education approved a new Mayoral Academy in Woonsocket after all three participating communities opposed the application.

S2019 requires local city or town approval of any new charter school or the expansion of an existing charter school. It is identical to legislation passed overwhelmingly by the House of Representatives on a 60-11 vote on January 27. The Senate passed a similar version of the bill at the end of last session but failed to reconcile differences with the House and the bill failed. The RIFTHP urges the Senate to enact this important charter school reform measure this session.

## **Empowerment Schools Opposed**

The RIFTHP outlined four broad areas of opposition to Governor Raimondo's proposal to create so called Empowerment Schools that was attached to Article 11 of the proposed State Budget. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi specified problems with the proposal. He offered written [testimony](#) on all of Article 11, including asking the Assembly to reject Empowerment Schools because the proposal:

- Entangles the Commissioner of Education in our collective bargaining relationship with school committees
- Requires school districts to pay tuition to other school districts for students attending Empowerment Schools without their consent or local approval
- Permits Principals to deny teacher transfers into empowerment schools, disrupting existing contract provisions related to teacher assignment and transfer

- Reduces teacher professionalism by permitting teachers to teach in subject areas in which they are not certified to teach.

Also opposing the measure was Lincoln Teachers' Association President Fred Hoppe, who spoke alongside Lincoln Superintendent Georgia Fortunato. They testified about collaboration that exists without state law changes. East Providence Superintendent Kathryn Crowley also spoke against the proposal. Bob Walsh of the NEA/RI noted some objections to the bill while recognizing opportunities that it may provide.

### **Article 11 (Education Aid) Supported with Huge Caveat**

The RIFTHP offered written testimony on all of Article 11, which includes many positive features proposed by Governor Raimondo. Among the items highlighted were:

- Additional funding for English Language Learners
- Cost of living adjustments for local school funding known as the Maintenance of Effort provision
- Restoration of additional money for districts transitioning to full-day kindergarten
- Revisions to the funding system for charter schools to take into account some of the costs traditional districts incur but charters do not.
- Additional state funding for districts that send more than 5% of their students to charter schools.

The RIFTHP expressed disappointment that the revisions to the education aid formula ignored the largest funding discrepancy between Mayoral Academies and other schools, namely pension contributions. Since Mayoral Academies are permitted to exempt themselves from participation in ERSRI, they get per pupil funding for large expenses they do not incur. The RIFTHP provided written evidence that Mayoral Academies are over-funding by **\$695** and **\$771** per pupil for Blackstone Valley Prep and Achievement First respectively. The RIFTHP asked the Senators to address this inequity as part of Article 11 deliberations.

### **Pension Income Tax Exemption**

RIAFT/R President Roger Boudreau provided testimony in support of income tax legislation before the House Finance Committee on Wednesday, May 4. The bill, [H7229](#) by Representative Craven, would exempt various retirement income, including government pensions, from Rhode Island income tax. The bill adopts the same income thresholds which the Assembly adopted last

year when they provided a tax break for social security income for tax filers under \$80,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for those married filing joint returns.

Roger Boudreau and others testified that after the significant pension reductions adopted by the Assembly in 2011, that the Assembly could mitigate those reductions by providing an income tax break for all government pensions. He and others argued that this is even more important because half of the state's teachers did not participate in social security and missed out on last year's tax break for certain retirees. This was similar testimony as that offered a week earlier in the Senate Finance Committee

### **Bills on the Move**

The following bills were passed by the Senate and have now been transferred to their respective House Committees to be heard:

#### **Resolution – STEM/STEAM Expansion**

[\(S2169A\)](#) *Gallo, Senate Passed*

This resolution requests the Board of Education to submit a plan to incentivize the creation and expansion of STEM/STEAM in all RI elementary and secondary schools; requests CCRI, RIC and URI to identify current partners and potential future collaboration with green sector businesses that identify areas of job demand and job growth with a corresponding schedule to develop certificate and degree programs; requests the Board of Education to encourage public higher education institutions to further develop degree programs leading to green sector employment; and authorizes and directs the Secretary of State to transmit certified copies of this resolution to the Chairperson of the Board of Education, Presidents of the CCRI, RIC, URI, and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Commissioner of Higher Education. The resolution was passed on March 3rd on a 34-0-4 vote.

#### **Epipen Availability**

[\(S2170\)](#) *Felag, House Health, Education and Welfare*

This bill would allow the storage of epinephrine cartridge injections by school departments for the purpose of administration on an emergency basis to students, that would be administered in accordance with the school department's conditions and procedures. The bill passed the Senate on 4/14 on a vote of 37-0-1. It was then transferred to the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee on 4/15.

### **Graduation Requirements – State Care**

([S2572aa](#) DiPalma, House Health, Education and Welfare)

This bill would require the Department of Elementary and Secondary education to promulgate rules and regulations regarding graduation requirements for public school students fourteen (14) years of age or older who are under the care and control of the state. It passed the Senate as amended on 4/27 on a vote of 35-0-3. It was then transferred to the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee on 4/27.

### **Advertising in Schools**

([S2673](#) Sosnowski, House Health, Education and Welfare)

This bill would prohibit the advertising of unhealthy food and beverage products in schools, that may not be sold on the school campus during the school day, since they do not meet the minimum nutrition standards. The bill passed the Senate on 4/14 on a vote of 34-4-2. It was then transferred to the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee on 4/15.

### **Career and Technical Education Student Internships**

([S2736aa](#) Lombardo, House Health, Education and Welfare)

This bill would permit children under eighteen (18) years of age who are attending career and technical education centers to participate in career and technical internships or teacher supervised job site training programs at or through said education center, provided that the students are deemed to have the necessary educational background, experience and maturity. The bill passed the Senate as amended on 4/26 on a vote of 35-0-3. It was then transferred to the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee on 4/27.

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