
The SMITH HILL REPORT



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Budget Introduced

Governor Gina Raimondo introduced her proposed state budget for the fiscal year 2018 from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 on Thursday January 19. Her budget bill, [H5175](#), was introduced by Representative Marvin Abney, who chairs the House Finance Committee. The House and Senate Finance Committees will now hold hearings on state spending proposals by each State Department and Agency. The Committees will also hear testimony on Budget Articles. Budget Articles are changes in state law related to state spending that are part of the state budget. Several of the Budget Articles are of particular importance to RIFTHP members.

[Article 3](#) – Rhode Island Promise Scholarship

The Governor announced her bold education initiative in her State of the State speech on Tuesday, January 17. That speech highlighted her proposal to create a state program to fund two years of higher education starting with the high school graduating class of 2017. The program would fund two years at CCRI or the junior and senior years at RIC and URI, after calculating other financial aid offered by other sources. The scholarship recipients must graduate from a Rhode Island high school by age 19, and start college immediately following graduation. Recipients at RIC and URI must be full-time students with a minimum 2.0 grade point average, declare a major and accumulate at least 60 credits. Students who have military obligations or medical conditions may be granted additional time without losing eligibility to participate in the program.

[Article 6](#) – Government Reform

Section 2 of this Article limits the rights of promoted state workers under the merit system to return to their former position if dismissed from the promoted position unless a collective bargaining agreement governs restoration of said employee to the prior position.

[Article 7](#) – State Funds

Section 2 of Article 7 authorizes the state to create a Performance Improvement Fund Act to fund incentives in state contracts of contracted government services as authorized by an independent evaluator.

[Article 13](#) – Medical Assistance and Uncompensated Care

Section 3 of this Article provides for a one-time increase for home care workers under the State's Medicaid program to promote an adequate supply of home health professions. The Governor is targeting approximately a 7% increase for personal care attendants and home care aides.

[Article 18](#) – Education Aid

This budget article ensures that the dedicated state funding program for English Language Learners continues beyond the current fiscal year.

[Article 23](#) – Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals

This Article provides a one-time payment increase to developmental disability organizations to provide pay raises for direct support professionals and job coaches in an amount to be determined by the appropriation process. The Governor is seeking approximately a 5% increase.

Education Secretary DeVos and Campbell Brown

President Donald Trump's nomination for US Department of Education Secretary is Betsy DeVos. She lacks any experience governing or supporting public schools. DeVos has been a defender of the Detroit charter school system and private school vouchers. She has served as chairwoman of the board of Alliance for School Choice and heads the All Children Matter PAC. DeVos is married to Dick DeVos and is the daughter-in-law of billionaire Richard DeVos, the co-founder of Amway.

The AFT has urged members to speak out against the nomination. To do so, use the link [Write to your senators today and ask them to vote no on DeVos' nomination](#). The Senate will be acting soon so do not delay if you want to weigh in on this nomination.

School voucher and education privatization advocate Campbell Brown will be at the Rhode Island Statehouse this Thursday, January 26, to attend a rally asking for more tax money for private schools and further expansion of charter schools.

Bill Introductions

School Athletics – Required Athletic Trainer or Nurse

([S0023](#) *F. Lombardi, Senate Education*)

This act would refine the law on guidelines for concussions at school and youth programs so that an adult trained in recognizing the symptoms of a concussion is required to be present during all events.

School Calendar – Start after Labor Day

([S0024](#) *Raptakis, Senate Education*)

This act would require public schools, including charter schools, begin the school year on the day after Labor Day commencing in the school year 2018-2019.

Retirement Income Tax Exemption Increase - \$15,000 to \$20,000

([S0027](#) *Felag, Senate Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would increase the exemption for retirement income from state income tax from \$15,000 to \$20,000 commencing in 2018.

Student Immunization Exemptions – HPV

([S0047](#) *Raptakis, Senate Health and Human Services*)

This act would make several changes to the Department of Health's authority to mandate certain vaccinations, would reinstate the philosophical exemption to vaccinations, and would require public hearings when changes to required vaccinations are proposed.

Constitutional Amendment – Line Item Veto

([S0051](#) *Raptakis, Senate Judiciary*)

The RIFTHP opposes this joint resolution which would submit to the electors a constitutional amendment granting the Governor the power to utilize a line item veto for appropriations.

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