
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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RIFTHP Lauds Tuition Proposal

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified in support of Governor Raimondo's plan to provide two years of tuition-free public higher education at a hearing of the House Finance Committee on March 15th. [Article 3](#) provides state funding to certain eligible students for the first two years at CCRI or the Junior and Senior year at URI or Rhode Island College. Hundreds of people, most of whom were high school students, were at the Statehouse to demonstrate their support for the proposal.

President Flynn said that for those students enrolling in RIC or URI, the plan will provide the incentive to finish on time with greatly reduced financial debt and allow students to remain in Rhode Island as productive citizens, both of which will greatly please their parents. He testified that the plan *"is not only an investment in our students and families, this is an investment in our institutions of higher education. Rhode Island currently ranks in the bottom 20% in the nation for State support for institutions of higher education. This Budget Article will generate much needed additional state revenue for these institutions."*

Frank Flynn concluded by telling the Finance Committee that Rhode Island has provided *"financial support in the form of grants and tax exemptions for many of our well established corporations as well as many start-up companies. These grants totaling hundreds of millions of dollars are designed to promote jobs and economic development which is great for RI, and that a similar investment should be made in our Rhode Island students."*

Dr. Colleen Callahan, RIFTHP's Director of Professional Issues and a member of the Board of Education, spoke to the committee at the hearing about her experience following a cohort of students from Central Falls High School as part of her doctoral research. She identified that a lack of financial resources was the primary barrier for those students continuing their studies at our higher education institutions.

The only two witnesses who expressed objections were the Providence Chamber of Commerce, concerned about the sustainability of the program because of budget considerations, and a representative of private higher education institutions who asked for consideration of their state funding along with the Governor's proposal.



Jay Walsh, Executive Director, AAUP at URI; Frank Flynn President, RIFTHP;
Dr. Colleen Callahan, Director of Professional Issues, RIFTHP;
Larry Purtill, President, NEA/RI

Contract Continuation Legislation Supported

The RIFTHP testified in support of legislation that would ensure that terms and conditions of employment for teachers and municipal workers would continue after a contract expires, while a new contract is negotiated. [H5593](#) by Freshman Representative Camille Vella-Wilkinson of Warwick, was heard in the House Labor Committee on Thursday March 16th.

RIFTHP Field Representative James Parisi offered testimony similar to remarks made two weeks earlier when a contract continuation and binding arbitration bill was heard in the same committee. He told the committee that Warwick's past and present experiences, indicate the need for the legislation. He informed the committee that Rhode Island's Supreme Court precedent was made in the early 1990s after a strike by the Warwick Teachers Union which kept terms and conditions of employment in place until a new contract was negotiated. This precedent was weakened by a Superior court ruling in East Providence where the school committee was allowed to unilaterally reduce teacher pay and benefits. The loss of teacher rights has continued with a recent court ruling in Warwick where the Warwick Teachers Union was prevented from arbitrating several grievances which arose after the most recent contract expired. While this ruling is being appealed, Parisi told the committee that court decisions taking away teacher rights have shown that legislative action is imperative.

Kathy Crowley (East Providence) and Donna Ottaviano (North Providence) testified against the bill on behalf of the RI Superintendent Association, claiming that there was no need for the bill. Also opposed was Tim Duffy of the RI Association of School Committees, and Brian Daniels of the RI League of Cities and Towns. Jim Cenerini of AFSCME Council 94 and Ray Sullivan of NEA/RI testified in support of the bill.

Carried Interest Legislation Introduced

A press conference was held on Thursday, March 16 where Representative Aaron Regunberg and Senator Adam Satchell explained why they introduced legislation to create a fairness tax on income of hedge fund and private equity managers. The bills, [S0259](#) and [H5563](#) would add a special Rhode Island income tax because hedge fund managers claim their income as capital gains, which is taxed at a lower rate than ordinary income. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi spoke in support of the bill at the press conference claiming that the legislation fixes a tax inequity that favors the super-rich. He also noted that resources to provide tuition assistance or car tax reduction are dependent on resources that could be generated by the proposed fairness tax. Finally, Parisi expressed his pessimism that Congress will act and believes it is up to individual states to fix the problem. Also speaking in support, was a member of the Patriotic Millionaires, Morris Perlman, who feels the wealthy should pay their fair share of taxes.



Senator Adam Satchell, Representative Aaron Regunberg,
James Parisi, Field Representative/Lobbyist, RIFTHP;
Michael Kink, Strong Economy for All Coalition;
Morris Perlman, Patriotic Millionaires

Bill Introductions

Voter Initiative

[\(H5341 Lancia, House Judiciary\)](#)

The RIFTHP opposes this bill which would provide a detailed process by which a proponent of a voter initiative and referendum proposal would present the proposal to the Secretary of State, the General Assembly and the Governor.

Concealed Weapons on School Grounds

[\(H5345 Kazarian, House Judiciary\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would provide that only peace officers and persons approved by the school authorities for the purposes of educational instruction may carry firearms or other weapons on school grounds.

Adjunct Faculty Medical Insurance

([H5367](#) *Jacquard, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would provide that adjunct faculty members at any state college or university who teach at least fifty percent (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.

Pension COLA – Retired Prior to July 1, 2012

([H5504](#) *Messier, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act, effective January 1, 2018, which would grant an annual increase of three percent (3%) cost-of-living retirement adjustment on the first fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) of a retiree's annual allowance, until the funded ratio of the pension funds, calculated by the retirement system's actuary on an aggregate basis, exceeds eighty percent (80%).

Mayoral Academy/MET Funding – Pension Costs

([H5459](#) *O'Brien, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would provide for a reduction to local per pupil funding for state-operated schools that do not have teachers who participate in the state teacher's retirement system (Employee Retirement System of Rhode Island).

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