
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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State Budget Highlights

The House Finance Committee voted to approve a revised state budget on Friday, June 8th. The House of Representatives will take up the Budget on Friday, June 15th. The Finance Committee work to put together a balanced budget was aided by better than expected state revenue. Among the issues tracked by the RIFTHP were the following:

Education Aid – the Assembly adopted the education funding proposed by the Governor, with some adjustments made due to enrollment changes. Most additional state funding went to charter school expansion. There was a very modest \$250,000 increase in funding for English language learner services.

School Construction Bond – The RIFTHP supported the Governor’s request for a \$250 million bond for school construction and renovation. The measure, if approved, will appear on the November ballot.

School Construction Program - The RIFTHP was successful in amending some of the details of the revised school construction program. The House Finance Committee rejected the Governor’s proposal to increase the minimum reimbursement charter schools get for school construction. The RIFTHP also ensured that one member of the advisory board overseeing the school construction state program is an educator. We also prevented state funding from being used to subsidize buildings that are not solely to be used as schools.

Higher Education – The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) employees at Rhode Island College was increased by 23, permitting the hiring of additional staff at the College.

Developmental Disabilities Funding – The House Finance Committee restored approximately \$18 million that Governor Raimondo cut from service providers. The Committee did not dedicate additional

state funding for raises for Direct Support Professionals (DSP) working in the field as the state has in the past several years.

Pension Revocation Expansion Proposed

The RIFTHP raised objections to a bill introduced on behalf of the Attorney General's office that would make it easier for public employees to lose their pension if convicted of criminal activity. Under current law, public sector workers can lose all or part of their pension benefits if they are convicted of financial-related felonies. [S2300](#) contains a provision that would expand the statute to apply to any job-related felony.

The RIFTHP offered written testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee when the bill was heard on Thursday, June 7th. In his letter to the Committee, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi noted that the bill could hurt innocent an spouse or dependents of the public employee. He also let the Committee know that the ability to withhold pension benefits is not permissible with Social Security or private sector pensions.

[Click here](#) to view a copy of the testimony.

Bills on the Move

The following bills have passed the Committee process and the full chamber of either the House or the Senate. To be enacted into law, the bill must pass the same process in the other chamber before being sent to the Governor for approval.

Substance Abuse and Suicide Prevention

[\(H7987 O'Brien, Passed the House \(73-0-2\), Senate Education\)](#)

This bill would require, rather than suggest, that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education incorporate substance abuse prevention and suicide prevention into the health education curriculum.

Resolution – Holocaust and Genocide Education

[\(H8185 Knight, Passed House\)](#)

This Resolution supports holocaust and genocide education in Rhode Island's schools. It passed the House on a vote of (66-0-9).

Unhealthy Food Advertising – Schools

([S2350A](#) Sosnowski, Sub A Passed Senate, and Passed House in concurrence))

This bill would prohibit the advertising of unhealthy food and beverage products in schools that do not meet minimum federal and state governmental nutrition standards. The bill's Sub A passed the Senate on a vote of (32-1-4) and the House on a vote of (62-8-5) in concurrence. The Governor signed the bill on June 4th.

Healthcare Facilities – Mandatory Overtime

([S2397aa](#) Conley, Passed Senate As Amended (36-0-0))

This bill would broaden the definition of "employee" for the purposes of mandatory overtime concerning health care facilities staffing. In addition to nurses, employees would include assistants and technologists providing direct medical care to patients. This bill would also allow a person's union or association to file an appeal from the administrator to the personnel appeal board.

Resolution – Holocaust and Genocide Education

([S2883](#) Goldin, Passed Senate))

This resolution strongly supports holocaust and genocide education in Rhode Island's schools. It passed the Senate on a vote of (32-0-5).

Resolution – Out of School Time Learning Commission

([S2894](#) Satchell, Passed Senate))

This resolution creates a special Senate legislative commission to be known as "Out of School Time Learning Commission." It passed the Senate on a vote of (36-0-1).

Senate Study Commission – Adult Education

([S2960](#) Metts, Passed Senate)

This resolution would create a thirteen (13) member special legislative study commission whose purpose it would be to conduct a comprehensive review and make recommendations regarding the appropriate state agency to house adult education, and who would report back to the Senate no later than March 1, 2019, and whose life would expire on July 1, 2019. It passed the Senate on a vote of (36-0-1).

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