

The

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## Bonds Pass by Large Margins

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, voters at the polls (along with the tens of thousands casting ballots in the mail) supported all seven bond measures on the ballot. Question 1, which is the bond to upgrade the Clarke Science Building at RIC and other higher education projects, passed by a wide margin. The vote results were as follows:

<b>RI 2021 Special Election</b>		<b>Total Votes</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>1. Higher Education Facilities - \$107,300,000</b>			
	Approve	62,737	59.4%
	Reject	42,919	40.6%
<b>2. Beach, Clean Water and Green Bond - \$74,000,000</b>			
	Approve	82,514	78.3%
	Reject	22,843	21.7%
<b>3. Housing and Community Opportunity - \$65,000,000</b>			
	Approve	69,165	66.0%
	Reject	35,581	34.0%
<b>4. Transportation Infrastructure - \$71,700,000</b>			
	Approve	85,195	80.7%
	Reject	20,405	19.3%
<b>5. Early Care &amp; Education Capital Fund - \$15,000,000</b>			
	Approve	70,516	66.8%
	Reject	35,061	33.2%
<b>6. Arts, Economy &amp; State Preservation Grants - \$7,000,000</b>			
	Approve	63,955	60.7%
	Reject	41,471	39.3%
<b>7. Industrial Facilities Infrastructure - \$60,000,000</b>			
	Approve	61,955	58.9%
	Reject	43,208	41.1%

## Civics Education Bill Advances

Senator Hanna Gallo has championed Civics Education throughout her legislative career. Her bill to enact a civics education graduation requirement was heard in the Senate Education Committee on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. The

RIFTHP offered written testimony in support for the bill ([click here](#)). [S0076](#) was approved by the Committee by an 8-0 vote and will be considered on the Senate floor on Tuesday March 9<sup>th</sup>.

In his testimony, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi noted the RIFTHP has advocated for civics consistently throughout the years. The RIFTHP support of the bill comes at a time when political issues such as racial justice and political transitions remain topics of conversation throughout society. As one of the founding reasons for public education is the promotion of civic participation, the RIFTHP offered support for Senator Gallo's bill. The RIFTHP supported the Senate bill that gives school districts discretion on meeting the graduation requirement. One note of caution offered was that districts may not be able to comply with the bill's target of being effective for the graduating class of 2022.

### **Elected School Committee Vote in Providence Proposed**

Representative Perez introduced a bill ([H5516](#)) that would ask Providence voters to consider establishing an elected school committee. The effective date of an elected school committee would be July 1, 2025. Currently, the Providence and Central Falls school systems are the only public-school systems without an elected school committee. The Providence School Board is appointed by the Mayor and the Central Falls Board of Trustees is appointed by the State Board of Education. Woonsocket, which had an appointed school committee for a period of time, recently went back to having an elected school committee.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn offered testimony ([click here](#)) in support of Perez's bill at the March 3<sup>rd</sup>, hearing of the House Education Committee. He said that an elected school committee would improve community and parental involvement in the local public school system. He also let the Committee know that the three instances of mass firings of teachers were all done under the auspices of school districts without elected school committees. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

### **State Worker Contract Continuation Bill Considered**

On Monday March 1<sup>st</sup>, the House Labor Committee took testimony on legislation by Representative Vella-Wilkinson to ensure state worker contract benefits continue until a new contract is negotiated. The state worker contract continuation bill, [H5402](#), using language that matches the contract continuation provision for teachers and municipal workers enacted two years ago.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi provided written testimony in support of the bill ([click here](#)). He noted that the RIFTHP includes six different bargaining units of state workers impacted by the bill. Parisi wrote to the Committee that since the state worker binding arbitration statute does not cover wages, that the bill is needed to protect wages while the parties mediate and negotiate a new contract. The bill was supported by NAGE,

the RI AFL-CIO, and NEA/RI. There was no opposition to the bill. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

## **BILL INTRODUCTIONS**

### **Student Bill of Rights**

([S0282](#) *Quezada, Senate Education*)

This bill would provide students attending public schools enrolled in grades K-12 with a students' bill of rights prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, gender, economic status or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disabilities.

### **Career and Technical Education Tuition Formula**

([S0284](#) *Gallo, Senate Education*)

This bill would provide that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in consultation with a workgroup composed of various stakeholders, would develop a funding formula for school districts sending students to career and technical programs outside their district.

### **Individual Career and Academic Planning System**

([S0285](#) *Gallo, Senate Education*)

This bill would implement an individual career and academic plan as a graduation requirement for each student enrolled in public schools in the sixth through twelfth grade, starting with students entering the sixth grade in the 2024-2025 school year. This act would take effect on January 1, 2022.

### **RIDE Instructional Support Program**

([S0286](#) *Pearson, Senate Education*)

This bill would direct the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide professional support and assistance to local education agencies ("LEAs") regarding effective ways to use data such as the LEA's budget and demographics, school culture, and assessments to improve student performance.

### **K-2 Class Size Limits**

([S0287](#) *Gallo, Senate Education*)

This bill would mandate that public school classroom size be limited to twenty (20) students for kindergarten through grade two (2). Exceptions are made for emergencies and temporary situation not to exceed three (3) days and for mid-year enrollments when it would be impractical to assign the student any class but an existing class of maximum size.

### **State Employee Pension COLA**

([H5359](#) *Messier, House Finance*)

This bill would award all members of the pension system a three percent (3%) annual benefit adjustment

(COLA) applied to the first thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) of a member's retirement allowance on and after January 1, 2022, provided the prior year investment return yields a gain of ten percent (10%) or more. This provision would apply until the pension system funding ratio exceeds eighty percent (80%).

### **School Resource Officer Funding**

([H5367](#) *O'Brien, House Finance*)

This bill would extend the reimbursement to a school district or municipality for the employment of newly hired school resource officers only.

### **Arming Campus Police**

([H5395](#) *O'Brien, House Judiciary*)

This bill would mandate arming campus police at public higher educational institutions and would include campus police in the definition of "law enforcement officer" for the purposes of the "Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights."

### **Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration**

([H5406](#) *Bennett, House Labor*)

This bill would establish new factors for the Interest Contract Arbitration Board for municipal employee unions as well as granting the Board power to render an award over all negotiated matters, including the expenditure of money.

### **Constitutional Amendment - Right to Education**

([H5421](#) *Messier, House State Government & Elections*)

This joint resolution would add two sections to the Rhode Island Constitution. One would guarantee Rhode Island residents an adequate education to permit them to learn at high levels, become lifelong learners, productive workers and responsible citizens and the other would make the rights guaranteed under the constitution judicially enforceable.

### **School Immunization Opt-Out**

([H5443](#) *Vella-Wilkinson, House Education*)

This bill would provide an exception to required school immunizations for pupils whose personal, philosophical, or religious beliefs are contrary to immunization and/or testing.

### **Distressed Community Child Enrichment Fund - Marijuana License Fees**

([H5450](#) *Williams, House Finance*)

This bill would establish the "Distressed Community Child Enrichment Program" which would create a grant program to fund educational programs in distressed communities. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the funds allocated would be designated to the Rhode Island STEAM Programs, and twenty-five percent (25%) of the

funds allocated would be designated to academic and non-academic programs. Funding for the program would be provided from three percent (3%) of the fees paid for compassion center approvals or renewals.

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