

---

*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



PUBLISHED BY THE RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS/AFT, AFL-CIO

---

March 16, 2021

## Bills on the Move

The following bills were approved by one chamber of the Assembly and have been referred to the other chamber for hearing and consideration.

### **Civics Education Graduation Requirement**

([S0076aa](#) - Gallo)

This bill would require that commencing with the graduating class of 2022-2023 and all subsequent graduating classes thereafter, all high school students attending public schools shall fulfill at least one-half credit or course requirement in civics education. This act would take effect upon passage.

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

([S0285](#) - Gallo)

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.

### **Student Possession of Sunscreen**

([H5164](#) - Bennett)

This bill would allow students in public schools to possess and use a topical sunscreen product. Children enrolled in grades K-5 would need a note from a parent or guardian in order to possess sunscreen on school property. This act would take effect upon passage.

### **Workplace Bullying Protection**

([S0196](#) - Ciccone)

This bill would establish the Dignity at Work Act, to provide workers with more protection from bullying and harassment in the workplace. This act would take effect upon passage.

## **Virtual Education Bill Heard**

On Wednesday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Education Committee took testimony on five bills. One of the bills considered by the Committee was legislation by Senator Roger Picard [S0151](#), which would allow school districts to schedule up to five virtual education days on inclement weather days without gaining approval by RIDE. Under current law, school districts are allowed to submit plans to host virtual education days on snow days subject to RIDE approval of the plan. The RIFTHP supported that law.

Senator Picard, a member of the Woonsocket Teachers Guild, submitted a bill two years ago to allow districts to schedule snow days without getting RIDE approval. The bill passed the Assembly and was vetoed by Governor Raimondo two years ago. The RIFTHP supported schools having the ability to provide a virtual education option on snow or other storm related days with RIDE oversight and supported the veto.

The RIFTHP submitted written testimony to the bill. In that letter, the RIFTHP did not object to the bill as we had previously done. After a year of all districts providing virtual education, there is no longer a need for RIDE to approve virtual education plans. The RIFTHP asked that S0151 be amended to protect the pay and benefits of non-teacher school workers and contract employees who are paid on an hourly basis. Teachers and other salaried employees will not lose pay when school is held virtually. The RIFTHP is concerned that other employees can lose scheduled hours and thus lose pay if a school day is held on a virtual basis. To view the RIFTHP written testimony, [click here](#).

## **House Education Hearing Testimony**

The RIFTHP offered verbal testimony on three bills heard in the House Education Committee on Wednesday, March 10<sup>th</sup>. All of the bills were heard and held for further study.

The RIFTHP testified in support of [H5355](#) by Rep. William O'Brien creating a bill of rights for public school teachers. The bill won our support for the variety of issues included in the bill. The bill contains language giving teachers a right to safe and healthy work environment, protection from being pressured to change grades, and a right to maintain discipline in the classroom. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified that the bill not only protects the professionalism of teachers, but that it would also enhance the learning environment for students.

The RIFTHP testified in support of [H5625](#) by Rep. Cortvriend. The bill, titled the Climate Literacy Act, would convene groups of teachers and other stakeholders to assist the Commissioner on the development of curricula and curricular materials to infuse environmental issues in them. The bill seeks to influence the current efforts to revise science, civics and social studies, math, and English language arts curricula. The

RIFTHP supported the approach to influence existing efforts rather than create new course requirements in the environment. A large number of environmental groups testified in support of the bill.

The RIFTHP testified in support of [H5836](#) by Rep. Shanley. The bill would allow high school students to attend career and technical education programs in other school districts but would stop requiring districts to pay out-of-district tuition payments to other districts if the CTE program is duplicative. Similar legislation has already been considered by the Senate Education Committee. The RIFTHP supported the bill as a method to prevent unnecessary tuition payments by districts who already offer specific CTE programs. The RIFTHP was joined by the RI School Superintendents Association and Warwick Superintendent Phil Thornton in testifying in support of the bill.

## **BILL INTRODUCTIONS**

### **Funding of Locally-Administered Municipal Pension Plans**

[\(S0293 Pearson, Senate Finance\)](#)

This bill would authorize the General Treasurer to withhold state aid to municipalities which do not meet certain requirements regarding locally-administered pension plans and, if applicable, funding improvement plans. This bill would direct the General Treasurer to place said funds in an interest-bearing account until the municipality meets certain requirements for their locally-administered pension plan, transitioned the plan into the municipal employee retirement system, or implemented a funding improvement plan.

### **Student Work Permit - Worker Rights Education**

[\(S0322 Gallo, Senate Labor\)](#)

This bill would require children who seek a special limited work permit to successfully complete a worker rights' training program established and funded by the department of labor and training.

### **Revenue for Rhode Island**

[\(S0326 Murray, Senate Finance\)](#)

[\(H5227 Alzate, House Finance\)](#)

These bills would add one new income tax bracket for purposes of Rhode Island state income taxation. The new bracket would be a rate of eight and ninety-nine percent (8.99%) on taxable income over three hundred ninety-four thousand five hundred dollars (\$394,500) (in 2011 dollars). Adjusted for inflation, the new tax bracket would apply to taxable income over approximately four hundred seventy-five thousand dollars (\$475,000) (in 2021 dollars), impacting only the top one percent (1%) of taxpayers.

### **Local Education Aid Maintenance of Effort**

[\(S0348 Rogers, Senate Education\)](#)

This bill would prohibit total education paid to any local education agency from being reduced by more than one percent (1%) of the municipal education appropriation in the previous year.

## **Consumer Science Curriculum Development**

([S0349](#) *Cano, Senate Education*)

([H5491](#) *Ackerman, House Education*)

These bills would require the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, in consultation with the Rhode Island Department of Education, to develop and approve statewide academic standards for the instruction of consumer education in public high schools no later than December 31, 2021.

## **Education Funding - Special Needs Students, BEP Review**

([S0350](#) *Pearson, Senate Education*)

This bill would modify the amount of education aid determined for each school district with respect to high-need students.

## **Substance Abuse Prevention Funding - Marijuana Fines**

([H5459](#) *Cortvriend, House Finance*)

([S0048](#) *Miller, House Health & Human Services*)

These bills would: (1) Place approval of drug awareness programs for minors up through high school level charged with civil marijuana offenses in the discretion of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH); (2) Redirect funds from certain civil fines imposed to the general revenue fund to be expended by BHDDH to fund substance abuse and student assistance programs for youth; (3) Mandate that BHDDH establish funding criteria for distribution of funds and require that municipalities receiving funds file annual reports verifying that the funds are being used for substance abuse prevention programs; (4) Make high schools eligible for assistance programs; and (5) Changes the Title of Chapter 16-21.3 to reflect high school participation in the programs.

## **Substance Abuse Prevention Education Funding - DUI Fines**

([H5471](#) *Cortvriend, House Judiciary*)

([S0058](#) *Seveney, House Judiciary*)

These bills would impose a three hundred dollar (\$300) substance abuse education assessment for any conviction of driving under the influence or a violation for refusal to submit to a breathalyzer. Those funds would be allocated to the department of behavioral health and used to fund substance abuse programs.

## **Workers Compensation - Covid-19 - Presumption**

([H5474](#) *Williams, House Labor*)

This bill would allow school committees to add item(s) to their agendas for the purposes of discussion only without having to publish notice of the additional item(s).

## **Criminal Background Check - BHDDH Licensed Employers**

([H5486](#) *Edwards, House State Government & Elections*)

This bill would require all applicants for employment with the department of behavioral healthcare, developmental disabilities and hospitals or any of its licensed facilities or programs to have the attorney

general's office conduct their mandated nationwide criminal records' check. The cost of the criminal records' check, including fingerprints, to be paid by the job applicant and/or the requesting agency.

### **Follow Us**

The RIFTHP has a twitter account for legislative issues. If you are on twitter, follow us @RIFTHPL.

SIGN UP  
NOW!



register to receive the SHR directly, [click here](#).