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*The*

# SMITH HILL REPORT



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

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April 2, 2021

## Charter School Moratorium Hearing Continued

On Wednesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, the House Finance Committee resumed testimony on the charter school moratorium legislation introduced by Representative William O'Brien. The hearing had commenced a week earlier, but hundreds of witnesses who had signed up were not able to testify before the first hearing ended at 11:00. A considerable number of witnesses were provided a minute to add their perspective during the five-hour hearing on the legislation.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified at the hearing. He said that first and foremost, the issue is about money and resources for all students. *"Charter proponents may want you to focus on some parents who want choice, but I want you to consider the learning conditions for students in community public schools. The recently approved expansion will cause public school funding for 5,500 students to leave Providence schools alone. Central Falls, a district that is already underfunded, will lose critical resources as well. Providence currently has about 20% of its students attending charter schools. Next year alone, Providence will have to divert an additional \$11 million in tuition payments for an additional 591 students attending new or expanded charter schools."*

He continued *"Previous testimony on this issue revealed that Providence Public Schools will have to cut between \$80 to \$100 million to fund the recently approved charter expansion once it is brought to scale. It is astonishing that Providence officials have no plan on how to handle the reduction of over \$80 million in school funding. I believe that it is exceptionally unfair and dishonest to the community not to reveal which neighborhood schools would close and what education programs would be curtailed to make-up for the budget cuts caused by charter expansion. There is no plan!"*

Joining Flynn as a proponent of the bill was Providence Teachers Union President Maribeth Calabro, Central Falls Teachers Union President Tracey Cavanaugh, RI AFL-CIO President George Nee, and NEARI lobbyist Patrick Crowley.

The RIFTHP has launched an electronic campaign in support of the legislation. To send an email in support of the legislation using the action network program, [click here](#).

### **State Funding for Teacher Professional Development Bill Heard**

On Wednesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, the Senate Education Committee heard testimony on [S0637](#) by Senator Melissa Murray to reinstate funding for teacher professional development. The State has not had a line item for teacher professional development in over a dozen years. The legislation would give the authority to spend the state funds to a district committee of five individuals, three teachers and two individuals appointed by the Superintendent. The state line item would be significant as the bill calls for districts to receive \$200 per student dedicated for professional development. When the state had teacher professional development money (remember Article 31 money?), the line item was \$5.8 million, or about \$40 per student.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill. He noted that when Massachusetts did its major education reform in the early 1990s, the state invested \$200 per student in teacher professional development. Since the Rhode Island Assembly attempted to replicate Massachusetts' curriculum legislation, he told the Committee it only makes sense that Rhode Island also support teacher training as Massachusetts has done. Parisi noted other professional development needs that merit state funding, such as the recent dyslexia legislation, civics education, and districts increasing certification requirements for teachers of ELL students.

### **K-2 Class Size Reduction, Education Savings Account Legislation Considered**

The RIFTHP offered verbal and written testimony on two other bills in the Senate Education Committee on March 31. Senator Hanna Gallo introduced legislation, [S0287](#), which would establish a statutory class size cap of 20 students in grades Kindergarten, 1 and 2. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi spoke in support of the bill. He offered some data to the committee on class size caps which exist in most, but not all teacher union contracts in the state. The average class size cap for Kindergarten students is 22.5. The average class size caps in grades 1 and 2 is about 24.5. He noted the Kindergarten class size cap varies from 16 in Newport to 29 in Providence. Parisi lauded the approach of limiting class size in early grades as something teachers and parents value. He also lauded the approach because it would benefit students in all school districts. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

At the same hearing, the RIFTHP submitted a letter in opposition to [S0455](#), a bill by Senator de la Cruz,. Her bill would establish Education Savings Accounts, a form of school voucher, for all students who are distance learning. Her bill would siphon off the per pupil allocation for distance learning students and give it to parents to spend on tutoring, technology, and supplies. The RIFTHP objected to the bill as it would divert money from districts that maintained expenses while providing both distance learning and remote learning during the pandemic. To view the RIFTHP letter in opposition to the bill, [click here](#).

## **Certified School Nurse Teacher Credentials**

The Certified School Nurse Teacher organization introduced legislation to affirm that school health programs would be staffed by fully certified nurse teachers. The legislation, [H5197](#) by Representative Corvese, was triggered by recent certification regulations adopted by the Board of Education that would allow an alternative pathway to school nursing to those who have not gone through the rigorous program available for Rhode Islanders. Deborah Svitil, a Cranston Certified School Nurse Teacher spoke on behalf of the organization. Several speakers from Rhode Island College explained the training that institution provides to prospective CSNTs. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi provided written testimony in support of the bill ([click here](#)).

## **Recording of Closed Hearings**

Last week, the RIFTHP submitted a letter opposing [H5032](#) by Rep. Newberry that would require the recording of closed public meetings. The letter was submitted for the House Judiciary Committee hearing on March 24<sup>th</sup>. In his letter, Parisi noted that unions frequently represent members at closed public meetings, such as grievance hearings, hearings on the non-renewal of a non-tenured teacher, or hearings for employment issues for tenured teachers. Those hearings, before school committees, are normally held in closed session. The RIFTHP objected to the recording of these private meetings for fear that the record's privacy would not be maintained. To view a copy of the written testimony, [click here](#).

## **BILL INTRODUCTIONS**

### **Income Tax Increase - Education Funding;**

([S0370](#) *Pearson, Senate Finance*)

([H5229](#) *Amore, House Finance*)

These bills would create a new income tax bracket for purposes of Rhode Island income taxation. The new bracket would be 6.99% on taxable income over five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000), and any personal income tax collected on income over five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) would be deposited into a restricted receipt account and shall only be expended on education for grades kindergarten through and including twelfth grade.

### **Charter School Funding Adjustments**

([S0373](#) *Pearson, Senate Finance*)

This bill would amend the local share of education funding to be paid to charter public schools based on a comparison of performance data between the specific school from which the student is coming and the specific charter school that will be receiving the student.

### **State Employee Cultural Competency Training**

([S0428](#) *Cano, Senate Labor*)

([H5752](#) *Giraldo, House State Government & Elections*)

These bills would require the office of diversity, equity, and opportunity (ODEO) to create and for all state employees to receive annual training in cultural competency. It would define "cultural competency" as an understanding of how institutions and individuals can respectfully respond to people from all different backgrounds such as race, language, economic, gender, veterans, and disabilities.

### **Sunday Overtime Pay - Healthcare Workers**

([S0431](#) *Quezada, Senate Labor*)

These bill would, for purposes of overtime pay on Sundays and holidays, remove health care and maintenance workers from the definition of employees not entitled to overtime pay, thereby enabling them to collect overtime pay.

### **Remote Learning Education Savings Account**

([S0455](#) *de la Cruz, Senate Education*)

([H5703](#) *Place, House Education*)

These bills would establish an education savings account program to assist and support the parents, guardians, and caretakers of students in any school district of the state with the materials, tutors, technology, and other educational support for any student learning at home or at any other remote-learning site.

### **African American History Curriculum**

([S0458](#) *Mack, Senate Education*)

([H5697](#) *Williams, House Education*)

These bills would require implementation of education courses in African American history in elementary and secondary schools in Rhode Island commencing in the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Post-Retirement Employment - 120 Days**

([S0460](#) *Lawson, Senate Education*)

This bill would increase the maximum amount of days for substitute teachers and athletic coaches from 90 days to 120 days.

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