



The

# SMITH HILL REPORT

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## Mayoral Charter School Bill Heard

On Wednesday, February 11, 2015, the House HEW Committee heard testimony on legislation filed by Rep. Pat Serpa ([H5160](#)) that would require school committee and city/town council approval to initiate a new mayoral academy charter school. Following the usual protocol, the committee voted to hold all bills for further study before hearing testimony on the bills.

Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill. He noted that the fiscal impact of setting up a parallel school systems was the central concern. He reminded the Committee that the Board of Education had not been responsive to community opposition in the past in places like Cranston and Woonsocket, making the legislation necessary. Mayoral Academy charter schools get extra money because they are not obligated to participate in the state pension system. The bill simply requires the community to be on the same page prior to an application going forward.

Sean Doyle, a West Warwick teacher and President of the West Warwick Teachers Alliance (WWTA) also testified in support of the bill. He recounted the concessions his members agreed to that were intended to keep the Town of West Warwick out of receivership. Yet, Mayor Avadesian proposed a Mayoral Academy that would have been a huge financial burden on his town had the application not been pulled.

Those testifying in support of the bill included Tim Duffy, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Association of School Committees; Pat Crowley, Assistant Executive Director of the NEA/RI; Mary Ann Roll, Vice-Chair of the Lincoln School Committee; Lisa Beaulieu, Chairperson of the Cumberland School Committee; and Karen Tarasevich, Superintendent of West Warwick Public Schools. Testifying against the bill were representatives of RIDE, RI-CAN (a corporate funded charter school advocacy organization), Rhode Island Mayoral Academies, and Kids Count. John Marion of Common Cause raised some concerns related to separation of powers.

## Voucher Advocacy Group Formed

The Center for Freedom and Prosperity is a corporate-funded conservative think tank that has used its resources to promote various causes. The group recently announced the initiation of a campaign to get public money for private school education through a school voucher program.

While no school voucher bill has been introduced yet, we expect that issue to have a higher profile due to the out-of-state money spent to

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promote that cause in Rhode Island. The Center's website announcing the new initiative begins with the following:

"The government school system is failing for to (sic) many Ocean State students."



## Bill Introductions

### **Income Tax – Retirement Income Exemption**

([H5203](#) *Serpa, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would exempt retirement income from state personal income tax.

### **Mayoral Academy Pension Participation**

([H5204](#) *Fellela, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would change mayoral academy teachers' and administrators' participation in the State Retirement System from voluntary to mandatory.

### **Tax Equity – Municipal Aid and School Construction**

([H5206](#) *Regunberg, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would impose tax increases on personal income over \$250,000 per year, with the revenue collected therefrom to be deposited into restricted receipt accounts for the purposes of state aid to municipalities and reimbursement of public school construction.

### **Income Tax – Retirement Income Exemption**

([H5207](#) *Trillo, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would exempt all retirement income from personal income tax for those individuals who have attained the age used for calculating the maximum social security retirement benefits.

### **State Employee Retiree Medical Benefits**

([H5211](#) *Corvese, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this bill which would amend certain provisions of the General Laws relative to insurance benefits provided to state retirees and repeals the section of law that ensures retired employees access to Medicare-eligible retiree health care insurance.

### **Higher Education Tuition – Immigration Status**

([H5228](#) *Diaz, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would create the "Student Equal Economic Opportunity Act" which would identify those students who are exempt from paying nonresident tuition at public universities, colleges or community colleges.

### **Income Tax - \$15,000 Retirement Income Exemption**

([H5236](#) *Morgan, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would exempt the first fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) from federal adjusted gross income when an individual withdraws from a retirement or savings plan.

### **Full Day Kindergarten Funding**

([H5275](#) *Ucci, House Finance*)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would provide that funding for kindergartens that have been converted from part-time to full-time beginning with the 2015-2016 school year would be fully funded beginning in fiscal year 2016.

### **Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration**

([H5350](#) *Carnevale, House Labor*)

**LaborVision is seen on Cox  
Ch. 14 and FioS Ch. 33**

**Tuesday @ 7PM**

**Thursday @ 7PM**

**Saturday @ 5PM**

The RIFTHP supports this act would expand compulsory binding arbitration subjects for municipal employees to include money matters with new arbitration factors and allows a collective bargaining agreement to continue while negotiations on a successor agreement takes place.

## Senate/House Contacts

To view a list of all 38 Senate members, including mail, phone and e-mail contact information, [click here](#).

To view a list of all 75 House members, including mail, phone and e-mail contact information, [click here](#).

This contact information will also be posted at the RIFTHP website at [www.RIFTHP.org/GAInfo](http://www.RIFTHP.org/GAInfo).

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