



SMITH HILL REPORT

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Local Approval Bill Reconsidered

The RIFTHP was pleased when the House HEW Committee and the Senate Education Committee passed charter school legislation requiring local approval by school committees and city or town councils on June 3rd. Unfortunately, the bills were not identical and both bills have been held up while the House and Senate reconcile the differences. The bills are scheduled for reconsideration this week.

Requiring local approval has been the top RIFTHP legislative priority this year, and we are heartened that both the House and Senate approved some version of local control. The Senate version would sunset (and therefore let the new provision expire) after one year. The Senate Education

Committee approved a funding freeze on charter school spending to help communities that will have to fund previously approved charter school expansion.

The House version contained a strong local control provision and a one year moratorium on new charter schools. The House did not contain the fiscal relief provisions that the Senate version contained.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn sent letters to the House and Senate ([click here](#) to view the letters) supporting the local approval provisions but asking that the one year sunset not be attached to the legislation.

Act Now

Over 650 letters to Senators and 650 letters to Representatives have been sent in support of the local control legislation working its way through the Assembly. Without enacting local control legislation, charter school spending will continue to grow much faster than communities can afford. The fact that a new Mayoral Academy was approved by the Board of Education on a 5-2 vote on June 9th even though the school committee and city/town council of all three sending communities (Woonsocket, Burrillville and North Smithfield) opposed the new school is a perfect example as to why the bill needs to be put into law this year.

If you have not done so already, take one minute, go to the following link, and send an email to support our effort to enact local control legislation this year.

ActionNetwork.org/letters/Support-Local-Approval-of-Charter-Schools

House Finance Committee Approves State Budget

On Tuesday, June 9th the House Finance Committee approved a State Budget that gave Governor Raimondo most of the financial tools she was seeking to jump-start the economy. The House Finance Committee also went along with the major spending cuts in the Medicaid program impacting hospitals and nursing homes. Increased state revenue from growing income tax collections helped the Assembly leaders to fashion a State Budget. The House of Representatives will consider the budget on Tuesday, June 16th.

The RIFTHP had worked on several important issues during the deliberations of the FY 2016 budget. There were also some provisions added to the budget after the March introduction of the legislation. Of particular concern to RIFTHP members are the following:

Full Day Kindergarten – The RIFTHP supported this provision in Article 6 of the State budget that mandates all school districts provide full day kindergarten by August, 2016. The state budget also contains an additional \$1.2 million to help districts without full day kindergarten as they plan for its implementation.

School Construction and Renovation – The RIFTHP supported the elimination of the four year moratorium on school construction and renovation that was contained in Article 9 of the state budget. The RIFTHP is pleased that the professionals doing the work at RIDE as part of AFT Local 2012 will continue under the Governor's proposal. The RIFTHP is also pleased that the Assembly went along with the Governor's request to add \$20 million state funding for the program. The RIFTHP opposed efforts to provide charter schools a greater share of state school construction money. We are pleased that the House Finance Committee rejected that proposal.

Pension Settlement – The pension settlement legislation was introduced late in the Assembly session. The terms of the settlement were incorporated in the state budget as Article 21.

Retiree Tax Breaks – The RIFTHP supported the proposed tax break to retirees for some social security income that was part of what is now Article 13. The RIFTHP, on behalf of retirees, advocated that the tax break also be provided for those with government pensions since half of the state's teachers are not allowed to participate in social security. The House Finance Committee supported the social security income tax break but did not adopt our proposal to expand it to government pensions.

State Worker Rights and Benefits – The RIFTHP opposed provisions of proposed Article 22 of the state budget that would limit state retiree medical insurance, eliminate any increases in state worker longevity payments and reduce recall rights of state workers. The House Finance Committee rejected those proposals. The Governors' proposed savings on state workers was reduced from \$22 million to \$5 million. There were no details attached to the proposed savings.