



# SMITH HILL REPORT

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## Supplemental Budget Revised After Committee Vote

On Wednesday, April 1, the House of Representatives made several substantive changes to the bill necessary to balance this year's State Budget. Among the changes made from the bill enacted by the Finance Committee days earlier was the reinstatement of some State aid to municipalities. The Finance Committee had eliminated \$55 million of State aid to municipalities. After considerable pressure and debate, the House Leadership was convinced to change course restoring approximately \$25 million using federal stimulus funds that were being preserved for next year's budget.

The House voted [68 to 4 (Reps. Loughlin, Newberry, Trillo and Watson)] to eliminate Article 8. RIDE, Local 2012; RIC/AFT, Local 1819 and PSA@RIC, Local 3302 opposed this provision that would have required collective bargaining agreements reached by the Board of Governors and the Board of Regents to be approved by the Governor.

While there were no changes made to the pension system, the Budget balancing bill did divert employer pension contributions into a separate account so that any savings from changing the pension plan could be restored back into the State budget. At the end of the 8-hour floor debate, House Finance Committee Chair Costantino did declare that pension changes were "inevitable" this year.

## Members Turn Out To Protect Rights

RIFTHP members from the West Warwick Teachers' Alliance arrived at the State House on Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, to object to a series of anti-worker bills being heard in the House Labor Committee, all of which were introduced by Representative Timothy Williamson.

- **H5505 - Title 16 – Eliminate Collective Bargaining References**  
The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would eliminate the collective bargaining references and requirements throughout Title 16. **Don Vanasse**, President, testified against the bill.
- **H5508 - Teacher Contract Nullification – Funding Shortfall**  
The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would provide that collective bargaining agreements would be null and void in those instances where actual funds to the school committee and/or district fell short of the actual funding received by the committee and/or district. **Sean Doyle** testified against the bill.
- **H5507 - Teacher Tenure – March 1 Notification, Continuous Contract**  
The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would eliminate the requirement that school districts notify a teacher that the teacher is not being rehired by March 1st of the school year immediately preceding the school year in which the dismissal would become effective. **Paul Bovenzi** testified against the bill.
- **H5506 - Delete Teacher Salary Step Statute**  
The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would delete the requirement that each community use a step system for paying public school teachers. **Pat D'Alfonso** testified against the bill.

# **Faculty and College Excellence Act of 2009**

On Tuesday, March 31<sup>th</sup>, the RIFTHP testified before the Senate Education Committee in **support** of **S-0730 (Miller)**. The bill is the RIFTHP's attempt to stop the trend away from the over-use of adjunct faculty in our public higher education institutions.

The bill would:

- Establish a statutory goal of reaching 75% of courses being taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty in each academic department of at least 8 FTE faculty members by September, 2015.
- Each of the three institutions (RIC, URI, and CCRI) would submit a compliance plan to the Board of Governors by January 15, 2010.
- The bill encourages institutions to utilize existing adjunct faculty to fill the vacancies created by the goals.

The national trend has been to reduce tenure and tenure-track jobs and use adjunct faculty to teach more courses. Tenure track means a person is eligible to earn tenure after serving a lengthy probationary period. Students are best served by faculties who have permanent ties to our institutions of higher learning. Some of the benefits of having tenured faculty are:

- Greater experience teaching in their field.
- Greater commitment to the institution as demonstrated by participation in committees and governance.
- Office hours for students.
- Commitment to build department course offerings over time.
- Ability to advise students on navigating the college bureaucracy.
- Quality control because of the evaluative process used to earn tenure.

## **Bill Introductions** **Senate Bills**

- **School Committee Meeting Notices**

(**S0044 Picard, Senate Judiciary**)

(**S0258 Bates, Senate Judiciary**)

(**S0600 Jabour, Senate Judiciary**)

The RIFTHP **opposes** these acts which would make public notice of school committee meetings in newspapers optional.

- **Voter Initiative**

(**S0345 Cote, Senate Constitutional and Regulatory Issues**)

The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would propose an amendment to the State Constitution by establishing a voter initiative process to allow voters to initiate proposed legislation which would, upon vote of the electorate, become law.

- **Charter Public Schools**

(**S0528 Doyle, Senate Finance**)

The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would provide a new structure for the creation, operation and funding of charter schools. The act makes distinctions for district charter schools, independent charters and mayoral

academies. The bill removes teachers at independent charter schools from mandatory participation in the State's pension plan.

- **School Committee Meeting Notice**

(**S0599 Raptakis, Senate Judiciary**)

The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would amend the open meetings law by permitting school committees to satisfy the publication requirements regarding their meetings through publication on a website maintained by the school committee or by publication in a newspaper.

- **Mediation Fees – Teachers**

(**S0626 Ruggerio, Senate Finance**)

The RIFTHP **supports** this act which would require that the State pay the total cost of compulsory mediation for school teachers.

- **Definition of Vesting**

(**S0629 Ruggerio, Senate Finance**)

The RIFTHP **supports** this act which would define "vested" as it applies to members of the State Retirement System.