



SMITH HILL REPORT

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Teacher Health Insurance Bills Heard

On Wednesday April 8, the House and Senate bills that would change the method of providing teacher health insurance were heard. **H5613** by **Representative McNamara** and **S777** by **Senator Gallo** are identical bills **supported** by the **RIFTHP**. The bills would create a statewide labor-management committee to develop teacher health insurance plan designs. Medical insurance cost sharing, waiver payments, and retiree benefits would be bargained on the local level. Plan design features, such as prescription coverage and office visit payments, would be determined by the statewide labor-management group composed of 6 union representatives (both AFT and NEA) and 6 representatives of the School Committees' Association.

The RIFTHP testified at the Senate Health and Human Services Committee and the House Health Education and Welfare Committee that the legislation would provide for cost savings by having a limited number of health insurance plan designs and by encouraging group purchasing to get the lowest possible premium rate. The legislation requires that at least three different plan designs (an HMO, a PPO (such as HealthMate Coast-to-

Upcoming House Finance Subcommittee Meetings	
Wednesday, April 22	1:00 P.M.
Public Higher Education	
Monday, April 27	11:00 A.M.
Department of Corrections	
Tuesday, April 28	1:00 P.M.
Department of Children, Youth & Families	
Wednesday, April 29	1:00 P.M.
Elementary & Secondary Education Public Television	

Coast) and a Health Savings Account be offered to district employees.

The RIFTHP has been meeting with legislative leaders and representatives of RIDE and the RI Department of Administration along with other labor leaders about the concept. The parties are currently investigating whether or not to include school support staff in the group purchase plan.

The bill differs significantly from the Governor's proposal in that it would create a statutory minimum cost-share or mandate a cap on waiver payments to employees who opt out of medical coverage.

Vacating Arbitration Awards

On March 10 and April 8, the **RIFTHP** offered support to legislation in the House and Senate Labor Committees about arbitration awards. The legislation (**H5335** by **Representative San Bento** and **S335** by **Senator McCaffrey**) would restrict a judge's ability to overturn grievance arbitration awards by clarifying the limited circumstances in which courts can overturn awards.

The legislation has been introduced for years, failing to emerge from the Assembly due to the opposition

by the representatives of municipal governments and school committees. The bill is necessary because of the change in court rulings where Rhode Island judges are increasingly willing to insert themselves in labor relations by voiding arbitration awards. In the private sector arbitration awards may only be overturned in very limited circumstances, such as evidence that the decision was tainted by fraud.

Bill Introductions

Senate Bills

- **RI Statewide Educator Health Insurance Plan**
(S0777 Gallo, Senate Health and Human Services)
The RIFTHP **supports** this act which would provide a mechanism for group purchasing of health, dental and vision insurance for all Rhode Island teachers.
- **Collective Bargaining Fiscal Impact Statements**
(S0784 Blais, Senate Labor)
The RIFTHP **opposes** this act which would require that collective bargaining fiscal impact statements be publicized on the city or town website for thirty (30) days prior to ratification.

Bill Introductions

House Bills

- **State Employees – Choice of Insurers**
(H5060 M. Rice, House Corporations)
This act would provide a choice of health care benefit providers to state employees provided that the employees pay any difference in price from that offered by the State's primary insurance provider.
- **Post-Retirement Employment – Alternative Retirement Plan**
(H5155 Constantino, House Finance)
This act would amend restrictions regarding eligibility for post-retirement employment to include participants in an alternate retirement plan provided to certain employees by the Board of Governors for Higher Education and/or the Office of Higher Education (TIAA-CREF participants).
- **Eliminate Mandatory School SIT Committees**
(H5164 Serpa, House Health, Education and Welfare)
This act would make voluntary the establishment of school improvement teams by school boards or school committees.
- **Private Hearings – Retired Judges**
(H5288 Gemma, House Judiciary)
This act would repeal the retired justice program.
- **Board of Governors Elimination**
(H5729 A. Rice, House Health, Education and Welfare)
This act would dissolve the Board of Governors for Higher Education effective January 1, 2010. The powers and duty of oversight would transfer to a new entity, the Board of Trustees for Higher Education, with oversight by the General Assembly.
- **Voter Initiative**
(H5735 Driver, House Judiciary)
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.
- **Providence – Elected School Committee**
(H5765 Almeida, House Municipal Government)
This act would provide that the members of the school committee in the City of Providence would be elected officials.
- **Afterschool and Summer Learning Program**
(H5802 Fox, House Health, Education and Welfare)
This act would require the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to begin planning a model after-school and summer learning program that meets high quality standards.
- **Mandate Relief - Successful Schools**
(H5803 Kilmartin, House Health, Education and Welfare)
This act would allow the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education to grant waivers to schools which continuously exceed performance goals.
- **School Closing – Primary Election Day**
(H5804 Ehrhardt, House Judiciary)
This act would eliminate the requirement that public elementary and secondary schools throughout the State be closed during a statewide primary.