



SMITH HILL REPORT

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RIFTHP Objects to Charter Expansion

On Tuesday, May 5, the RIFTHP testified **against** two budget articles in the Senate Finance Committee. **Article 3** is the Governor's proposal to reduce education funding based on cuts to teacher and state worker pensions. The Article budgets \$1.5 million in State money to open two new charter schools this September.

The RIFTHP testified that it would be unconscionable for the Assembly to fund two new charter schools when local school districts are in such financial distress. The Union noted that the expansion of charters run contrary to the outcry by those who are seeking school and municipal service consolidation. Rhode Island used to have 36 school districts. Because of the growth of independent charter schools, Rhode Island now has 44 districts.

The RIFTHP reminded the Committee that the Governor's pension proposal saves considerable money by taking benefits from vested employees, a move that is both wrong and illegal.

The RIFTHP did give Governor Carcieri credit for restoring the State funding for teacher professional development

That same day the Senate Finance Committee heard testimony on **Article 7**. Article 7 would permit existing and future charter schools to remove their staff from required participation in the State Pension Plan, tenure system, and payment of prevailing wages and benefits. The proposal would expand the reduced teacher rights and benefits offered to Mayoral Academy staff to all charter schools when the charter is up for renewal with the Board of Regents.

The RIFTHP testified that the Union objected to the proposal last year, arguing that cutting pay and benefits of charter school teachers is not productive or beneficial to the profession. Also testifying against the proposal was the NEA/RI and retired Providence Teacher **Madeline Robinson**. She targeted her testimony to Cumberland Mayor Dan McKee's proposed school opening and how it would negatively impact taxpayers and the local school districts.

Bills on the Move

- **Universal Voluntary Retirement Accounts**
(**S0453** *Walaska, House Constituent Services*)

This resolution would create an eight (8) member special legislative commission whose purpose it would be to make a comprehensive study of the establishment of Universal Voluntary Retirement Accounts, and who would report back to the general assembly no later than January 14, 2010. The bill passed the Senate

on April 23 and was sent to the House Constituent Services Committee.

- **Center for Health Professions**
(**S0049** *Pichardo, House Health, Education and Welfare*)

This act would create a center for health professionals for the development of a healthcare workforce. The bill passed the Senate on March 4 and was sent to the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee.

- **Bachelors Degree in Three Years Program**
(H5286 McNamara, Senate Education)
This act would authorize the "Bachelors Degree in Three" program, a new educational initiative designed to expedite the process so that students can earn a bachelors degree at a State college or university within three (3) years. The bill passed the House on March 25 and was sent to the Senate Education Committee.
- **Voter Registration – Pre-registration of Persons 16 - 17 years old**
(H5005 Pacheco, Senate Judiciary)
The RIFTHP supports this act which would authorize persons sixteen (16) and seventeen (17) years of age who preregister to vote to automatically be registered upon reaching age eighteen (18). The bill passed the House on March 10 and was sent to the Senate Judiciary Committee.
- **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. The bill passed the House on May 7.
- **Advertising on School Buses**
(H5118 Gemma, House Health, Education and Welfare)
This act would authorize the school committee of any city, town or regional school district to sell advertising space on school buses. The bill passed out of committee on April 30.
- **Resolution to Study Teacher Compensation**
(H5724 Gablinski, House Health, Education and Welfare)
The RIFTHP opposes this act which would direct the House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations to request the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to conduct a study of restructured performance-based teacher compensation systems that would provide incentives to teachers for developing their knowledge and instructional skills in order to improve student learning. The bill passed out of committee on April 30.
- **Woonsocket Student Dress Code**
(S0020 Picard, House Municipal Government)
This act would give authority to the school board for Woonsocket to establish a dress code for elementary, middle and high school students. The bill passed the Senate on April 1 and was sent to the House Municipal Government Committee.

Members Go To Capitol Hill

RIFTHP scheduled several "Face-to-Face" meetings with legislators and their constituents, RIFTHP members, to talk about the problems facing the State and municipalities and about solutions being offered to address them.

Dozens of members from many of the local unions and the retiree chapter have met with their Representatives and Senators.

The following is a list of the meetings since last reported:

**Senator Dan DaPonte and
Senator Frank DeVall**

Ron Beaupre (Pawtucket)
Pat Beaupre (Pawtucket)
Adele Facenda (Pawtucket)
Christina Collins (Pawtucket)

Senator James Doyle

Donna Laliberte (Pawtucket)
Brenda Warnock (Pawtucket)
Carol Folan (Pawtucket)
Mark Matook (Pawtucket)
Christina Keiser (Pawtucket)

Representative Steven Ucci

Richard Perrotta (Cranston)
Jeannine D'Agostino (Pawtucket)
Bonnie Colletta (Pawtucket)
Donna Smith (8037R)
Robin Carlone (Pawtucket)
Rachel Abatecola (Pawtucket)

Senator Michael Pinga

Maria Monti (West Warwick)
Alyson Satchell (West Warwick)
Adam Satchell (West Warwick)
Frank Flynn (Cranston)
Janice Matthews (West Warwick)

Senator Paul Fogarty

Keri Fournier (Pawtucket)
Michael Cookson (Pawtucket)
Margaret Prete (Pawtucket)
Katherine Wilson (Pawtucket)
Mike Trofi (West Warwick)
Christina Bell (Lincoln)

Senator Leo Blais

Pam Tavares Turner (West Warwick)

Meetings are being scheduled every week on an ongoing basis. To participate in a meeting, members should contact their local union or call the RIFTHP office at 273-9800.