



# SMITH HILL REPORT

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## **RIFTHP Opposes Charter School Pension Change**

On Thursday, May 28, the **RIFTHP** testified **against H5632** sponsored by **Representatives Silva, Gablinske** and **Vaudreuil**. The 38-page bill re-writes the entire Rhode Island charter school law, creating three distinct categories. The law describes the three types of Rhode Island charter schools as District Charter Schools, Independent Charter Schools, and Mayoral Academies. The three existing District Charter Schools are staffed by RIFTHP teachers, namely Times 2 Academy and the Textron Chamber of Commerce School in Providence and the Laborers Charter School in Cranston. There are currently eight Independent Charter Schools, all of which are staffed with non-union teachers. There are now no Mayoral academies, although Cumberland Mayor Daniel McKee is lobbying vigorously for State money to open his new school, notwithstanding the current State fiscal crisis.

The RIFTHP testified against the bill because it would allow teachers at Independent Charter Schools to leave the State Retirement System, further diminishing the number of employees contributing into the pension fund. The District Charter School staff would not have pension benefits changed with the legislation. RIDE and the League of Charter Schools supported the bill, even though it would increase State spending for Independent Charter School construction by over \$3 million.

The RIFTHP also criticized the bill for not tackling funding issues surrounding charter schools. The Union questioned why independent charter schools should continue to receive the same per pupil funding amount from sending districts if the school saves money by offering an inferior pension benefit to its teachers?

## **Unions Amend Notification Bill**

On Wednesday, May 27, the Senate Labor Committee passed **S384**, introduced by **Senator DiPalma**, that amends the State law concerning notification to teachers of impending termination or layoff. The original bill would have changed the notification date to June 1 instead of March 1. The bill has been promoted by school administrators and school committees as an effort to limit the number of unnecessary layoff notices by permitting the issuance of the notices later in the school year. The **RIFTHP** has consistently **opposed** this bill each year it has been introduced, asking for teachers to receive the most notice possible if they are to potentially be laid off or terminated so that they may conduct job searches.

The amended version of S384 maintains the March 1 notification date for the non-renewal of non-tenured teachers and the termination of tenured teachers for performance-related issues. It changes the notification date of lay-offs for pupil population decline and the termination of non-tenured and tenured teachers due to program reductions and budget cuts to May 15.

While the RIFTHP did *not support* the original bill, the Union and the NEA/RI did work with **Senator DiPalma** on amendments to maintain adequate notice and provide for an opportunity for a hearing for those teachers being terminated for performance-related reasons. The RIFTHP was unsuccessful in its attempt to provide statutory recall rights for all layoffs, not just layoffs for pupil population decline. The Senate was unwilling to provide additional statutory recall rights to teachers, noting such rights may be provided for in collective bargaining agreements.

## **RIFTHP Leadership Meets With US Senators**

Along with passing the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) and providing affordable and quality health care for all, RIFTHP leaders and staff met with **US Senators Jack Reed** and **Sheldon Whitehouse** to talk about our concerns regarding Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's idea to "charterize" chronically low-performing public schools.

Presidents **Marcia Reback**, RIFTHP; **Charleen Christy**, Pawtucket Teachers Alliance; and **Frank Flynn**, Cranston Teachers Alliance; and RIFTHP Director of Political Activities, **Maureen Martin** met with **US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse** at his Providence Senate Offices on May 15.

On May 18, Presidents **Steve Smith**, Providence Teachers Union; **Roger Boudreau**, R.I. AFT/Retirees; **Rob Bower**, Professional Staff Association at RIC; RIFTHP Director of Professional Issues, **Colleen Callahan**; and **Maureen Martin** met with **US Senator Jack Reed** at his new RI Senate Offices in Chapel View, Cranston.

### **Bills on the Move**

- **Joint Study Commission on Teacher Preparation**  
(**H5896A Fox, House Constituent Services**)  
This resolution would create a twenty (20) member special legislative study commission, including a RIFTHP appointee. The commission will study the establishment of a blueprint for a new generation of teacher education in Rhode Island and who would report back to the General Assembly no later than February 1, 2011. The bill passed out of Committee on May 28 and is scheduled to be considered by the full House on June 4.
- **Teacher Termination Process**  
(**S0395A DiPalma, Senate Education**)  
This act would revise certain provisions regarding the language associated with the "Rights and Duties of Teachers Generally" regarding the dismissal of teachers in the city of Woonsocket and the town of Cumberland. The bill passed out of Committee on May 27 and is scheduled to be considered by the full Senate on June 3.
- **Driver Education – Course for Parents / Guardians**  
(**S0459 Tassoni, Senate Constitutional and Regulatory Issues**)  
This act would provide for a voluntary course of instruction for parents or guardians relative to the content of the driver education curriculum. The bill passed out of Committee on May 27.
- **Public Entity Insurance Collaborative**  
(**S0781 Levesque, Senate Housing and Municipal Government**)  
This act would allow any city, town, school committee, water or fire district, or other public or quasi-municipal authority, agency or entity, or organization that is an instrumentality of such cities or towns to establish agreements for obtaining or effecting insurance. The bill passed out of Committee on May 21 and was passed by the Senate on May 28.
- **First Grade – September 1 to September 30**  
(**H5642 Carnevale, House Health, Education and Welfare**)  
This act would make every child who has completed a state recognized or accredited kindergarten program and has completed six years of life on or before September 30 of any school year eligible to attend first grade. The bill passed out of Committee on May 27.
- **Kindergarten, First Grade Age of Attendance**  
(**H5644 Ucci, Senate Constitutional and Regulatory Issues**)  
This act would authorize school departments to admit children into their kindergarten programs even though those children have not reached age 5 by September 1 of the school year. Such admissions would be made in accordance with guidelines promulgated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The bill passed out of Committee on May 27.