



SMITH HILL REPORT

Testimony Provided on Supplemental Budget Articles

On Thursday, January 7th the RIFTHP testified in the House Finance Committee concerning some of the articles in the proposed Supplemental Budget. The following are excerpts of the testimony:

The RIFTHP opposes any effort to reduce aid to cities, towns and school districts. Such funding will harm programs, further reduce worker pay and benefits, threaten additional job loss of Rhode Islanders, and increase school budget reliance on property taxes. For this reason, the RIFTHP is opposed to Article 2, which cuts aid to cities and towns, and the 3% aid reduction to schools in Article 9.

Article 9 would also suspend school district appeal rights under the Caruolo actions. The RIFTHP opposes the suspension of school district funding appeals and hopes the Assembly can find a way to streamline the dispute resolution process between municipalities and school districts without endangering school programs that would result from the suspension of Caruolo actions.

The RIFTHP is glad to see the Governor embrace binding arbitration of school/municipality budget disputes even though he opposed binding arbitration of teacher contract disputes. We cannot support that portion of Article 9 because it would permit the suspension of collective bargaining agreements in the event of a funding shortfall. The RIFTHP finds this provision to be an unconstitutional abridgement of contracts by State government.

Article 9 also would require city/town council ratification of school employee contracts. The RIFTHP opposes this effort which would require school employee unions to negotiate twice. Until the General Assembly eliminates school committees as the employer of school district employees, we ask that the contract ratification process of labor agreements not be changed by requiring multiple entities to approve tentative agreements.

The RIFTHP is concerned that Article 18 would interfere with collective bargaining by implementing group purchasing, including multi-state purchasing, of dental and other insurance programs currently provided for in contracts.

A large number of mayors and other local government leaders also testified against the State aid cuts to cities and towns. Forty-one of the 75 House members have reportedly signed a letter opposing these cuts in local aid.

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