



SMITH HILL REPORT

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Collective Bargaining Changes Considered

On Thursday, April 15, the House Labor Committee heard testimony on major changes to the teacher collective bargaining law. Representative Pat Serpa introduced legislation (**H7967**) that would require teacher unions to negotiate directly with town/city councils instead of school committees. Her legislation would not impact school support staff, only certified staff. The Serpa legislation was introduced amidst debate over whether or not teacher contracts should be ratified by city/town councils. The RIFTHP has opposed council ratification as it requires us to bargain twice, first with the school committee and then with the council. There is also considerable debate in the State House on preventing school districts from suing to obtain additional funding from municipalities in what are called Caruolo actions.

The RIFTHP testified at the hearing that our preference was the status quo. The RIFTHP has objected to council ratification of contracts negotiated by school committees and would prefer

to not disrupt the employee-employer relationship. However, if there was pressure to allow council ratification of contracts, we would maintain our objection to bargaining with both councils and school committees. Given that choice, we voiced a preference for negotiating once with city/town councils rather than negotiating twice.

The NEA/RI supported the Serpa legislation, as did the League of Cities and Towns. The RI Association of School Committees opposed the bill, claiming union support for the legislation was an attempt to void court decisions that have limited the scope of collective bargaining with school committees.

While the bill was not acted upon, the issue of teacher collective bargaining will be a topic of debate as the House and Senate work on a Supplemental Budget bill to balance the current fiscal year.

Certification Standards Board

The RIFTHP repeated prior testimony in support of legislation (**S2035** - Maselli) that would transform an advisory board on teacher certification to a governing board on teacher certification. The bill is vitally important now that the Regents are considering eliminating the IPLAN system without having developed a new system of teacher certification. The RIFTHP also noted that if teachers controlled the professional standards, Rhode Island may not be considering tying certification to job evaluations.

Paulajo Gaines of RIDE testified against the change in law, seeking to preserve the Regents as the decision-making authority to teacher certification issues.

Employee Free Choice Act

On Thursday, April 15, the RIFTHP also supported legislation by Rep. Almeida (**H7940**) to allow public sector unions to be recognized without an election if 70% of the proposed bargaining unit signed contract authorization cards. This legislation is similar to federal legislation promoted by the AFL-CIO for all private sector workers. AFSCME Council 94 supported the legislation. The League of Charter Schools and the League of Cities and Towns both testified against the bill.

Collective Bargaining Preservation

Legislation introduced by Senator Paul Jabour (**S2479**) would preserve collective bargaining rights even if the school is identified as being in need of improvement by the State. The RIFTHP again supported legislation to preserve bargaining rights by asking the Assembly to put into State law the same provision existing in federal law.

The RIFTHP noted that the current, highly-publicized dispute in Central Falls exists because there is a lack of clarity as to the status of bargaining rights in schools identified as being in need of improvement. The Union asked the Senate Committee to provide clarity and comport with federal law by preserving bargaining rights in all public schools. The only opposition to the bill was voiced by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Activists for Congressional Education Meeting Held

On April 7, the RIFTHP and local leaders met with US Senator Jack Reed to talk about the Obama Administration's blueprint for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and about the Local Jobs for America Act.

RIFTHP President Marcia Reback, Cranston Teachers' Alliance President Frank Flynn, Lincoln Teachers' Association President Mary Ann McComiskey and RI AFT/Retirees' President Roger Boudreau along with Colleen Callahan, RIFTHP Director of Professional Issues and Maureen Martin, RIFTHP Director of Political Activities, talked with Senator Reed and his staff at the Senator's RI office in Cranston.

The Union delegation said that the reauthorization must correct what time and

experience have shown to be the serious flaws in the last iteration of ESEA – the No Child Left Behind Act. One of the many concerns expressed was the proposed reliance on competitive grant programs to provide funding to some students that should instead be provided to all students in need. The proposal runs counter to the original intent of ESEA: to provide support for disadvantaged children. A child's education should not be dependent upon how well adults write grants.

Senator Reed was also encouraged to pass a comprehensive jobs package that includes money in the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds for education, maintains support for the Federal Medical Assistance Percentages to the States, and extends unemployment insurance and COBRA for all of 2010.

Make Sure Your Vote Counts

There is no time like the present to check on your voter registration status.

It only takes a minute to check your status at <http://sos.ri.gov/vic/>.

If your information is not found, go to <http://www.elections.ri.gov/voting/registration.php>.

Simply download the Voter Registration Form, enter your information, print the form and either mail or deliver it to the appropriate Board of Canvassers. A link to the listing of the Board of Canvassers is located directly below the link to the form.

If you are not registered, whether you have never registered or have had a change of address or name since the last election, please take the above steps to make sure your vote can count during this important election cycle.