

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



PUBLISHED BY THE RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS/AFT, AFL-CIO

March 9, 2026

Save School Libraries Act

On March 5, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee in support of S-2078, the School Libraries Act, and submitted [written testimony](#) for the record. RIFTHP joined a large and diverse coalition supporting the legislation. Sencer emphasized the important role certified school librarians play in promoting literacy, supporting student research, and helping students develop media and information literacy skills necessary to navigate today's digital environment. Current librarians, retired librarians, and classroom teachers also delivered powerful testimony describing the importance of strong library programs and equitable access to learning resources for Rhode Island students. The committee held the bill for further study.



Tasha White, Peter Quesnel, Diana Brooks, and Tom Nolan (L to R) testified before the Senate Education Committee on the importance of fully staffed libraries in all schools.

Unemployment Benefits for Striking Workers

On March 5, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) to the House Labor Committee in support of H-7440, legislation addressing unemployment benefit eligibility during labor disputes. RIFTHP joined a large and diverse coalition supporting the bill. In its testimony, RIFTHP emphasized that unemployment insurance exists to protect workers facing loss of income and that allowing access to benefits during strikes or employer-imposed lockouts helps prevent financial hardship for working families while negotiations continue. The committee recommended the measure be held for further study.

School Meal Payment Fees

On March 4, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) to the Senate Education Committee in support of S-2635, legislation that establishes important protections for families making payments for student meals. RIFTHP joined a large and diverse coalition supporting the bill. In its testimony, RIFTHP emphasized that families should not be required to pay profit-generating or convenience-based fees simply to deposit funds into student meal accounts and highlighted the importance of ensuring fair, transparent payment systems across districts. The committee held the bill for further study.

Anti Hazing

On March 4, RIFTHP Field Representative Jeremy Sencer testified before the House Education Committee in support of H-7003 and submitted [written testimony](#) for the record. Sencer emphasized the importance of ensuring that hazing, bullying, and harassment have no place in school athletic programs and highlighted the value of consistent statewide policies that promote safe and supportive school environments for student-athletes. Sencer also emphasized that while the legislation focuses on athletics, anti-hazing protections should ultimately apply to all school activities, clubs, and student organizations to ensure consistent standards of safety and accountability across school communities. The committee held the bill for further study.

Member Advocacy In Action

On March 5, teachers from Pawtucket and West Warwick brought their voices to the State House, meeting with legislators to advocate for the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals' priority legislation. Members spoke directly with lawmakers about the real challenges facing their classrooms and the policies needed to support strong public schools and safe learning environments. Their presence on Smith Hill demonstrated the power of member advocacy and ensured that legislators heard directly from the professionals working with Rhode Island students every day.



WWTA President Paul Bovenzi and COPE Chair Anne Godin at the State House with RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer and AFL-CIO President Patrick Crowley

This Week

The House Education Committee will hear several important bills on Tuesday, including:

- Legislation placing a moratorium on the approval or expansion of charter schools beginning with the 2026–2027 school year, as well as a cap reduction from 35 to 25
- A bill requiring charter school applicants and renewals to include a union neutrality clause if teachers and staff seek to organize
- A resolution creating a legislative commission to study Rhode Island's charter school funding system
- Legislation creating the Save Rhode Island School Libraries Act
- A bill nullifying the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's recommendation to continue the Providence Public Schools turnaround plan

Bill Introductions

Expanded In-State Tuition Access for RI High School Graduates

([H8252](#), Diaz, House Finance)

([S2650](#), Ciccone, Senate Finance)

These bills allow students who graduate from a Rhode Island high school and meet certain residency requirements to qualify for in-state tuition at Rhode Island public colleges and universities by reducing the required high school attendance from three years to at least one year.

Funding Formula Revision

([S3015](#), Gallo, Senate Finance)

This bill establishes the Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act, creating a revised formula for funding public education across all levels in Rhode Island.

Student Opt-In for College/University Health Insurance

([S3011](#), Vargas, Senate Education)

This bill prohibits public and private colleges and universities from charging students for institution-provided health insurance unless the student affirmatively opts into the coverage.

Study Commission for Regionalization

([SR3009](#), Acosta, Senate Education)

This joint resolution creates a nine-member commission to study shared services and the potential regionalization of school districts and requires a report to the Senate by April 15, 2027.

Elimination of PTU Bargaining Rights / Providence Teacher Contract Changes

([S2934](#), Zurier, Senate Education)

This bill allows a separate minimum salary schedule for Providence Public School teachers and establishes new procedures for teacher dismissal and demotion, with the state takeover and reconstitution of Providence Public Schools scheduled to end on June 30, 2026.

Teacher Dismissal After March 1st

([S2933](#), Valverde, Senate Labor & Gaming)

This bill allows the dismissal of a teacher after the March 1 statutory notice deadline when the dismissal is based on gross misconduct involving a student, permitting notice to be issued at any time.

School Indoor Air Quality Standards and HVAC Assessments

([S2873](#), DiPalma, Senate Health & Human Services)

This bill requires inspection and evaluation of indoor air quality in public schools and directs the Department of Health to establish recommended thresholds and environmental standards affecting health and learning.

School Transportation Reimbursement

([S2849](#), Gu, Senate Finance)

([H7682](#), Cotter, House Finance)

These bills allow a school district that can provide transportation through its own buses or vendors at a lower cost than the statewide transportation system to receive reimbursement from state funds for those expenses.

Early Intervention Extension — Bridge to Preschool

([S2834](#), Valverde, Senate Finance)

([H7627](#) Tanzi, House Health and Human Services)

These bills permit children with developmental disabilities whose third birthday falls between May 1 and August 31 to continue receiving early intervention services until September 1 to prevent gaps before preschool special education services begin.

Private School Scholarship Tax Credit Expansion

([S2817](#), de la Cruz, Senate Finance)

This bill expands the private school scholarship tax credit program by allowing individual contributors, increasing the annual tax credit cap, raising the percentage value of credits for contributions, and allocating scholarship funding for economically disadvantaged students and pre-K programs.

Making the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Permanent

([S2807](#), Pearson, Senate Finance)

This bill removes the sunset provision for the Rhode Island Hope Pilot Scholarship Program, making the program permanent and renaming it the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship Program.

Questions

RIFTHP members with questions about the Smith Hill Report or our legislative agenda may reach out to RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer at (401) 273-9800 or at jsencer@rifthp.org.

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