

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

March 16, 2026

Charter Moratorium & Cap Reduction

The House Education Committee heard testimony on H7415, legislation sponsored by Rep. Mary Messier that would place a moratorium on the approval of new charter schools beginning in the 2026–2027 school year and prohibit state funding for any charter school not approved prior to July 1, 2025.

The hearing drew significant turnout from public education advocates, including a large mobilization by the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP). More than 100 RIFTHP members attended the hearing, demonstrating strong grassroots support for the legislation. RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in person, emphasizing the need to stabilize Rhode Island’s public school system before allowing additional charter expansion.

RIFTHP Field Representative Jeremy Sencer also testified, along with 20 additional RIFTHP members, including educators and school staff from across the state. Testimony focused on protecting resources for traditional public schools, ensuring equitable funding, and maintaining strong working and learning conditions for educators and students.

The hearing included written testimony and attendance from elected officials and municipal leaders from multiple Rhode Island communities, underscoring that concern about charter expansion extends beyond educators. Municipal leaders emphasized that continued charter growth places significant strain on local budgets and diverts funding from the traditional public schools that serve the overwhelming majority of Rhode Island students.

Supporters of the bill also raised concerns that charter expansion can create parallel school systems with separate administrative structures, increasing overall administrative costs for the state’s education system. Testimony further noted that many charter schools serve different student populations than district schools, often enrolling lower proportions of high-need students, including those requiring intensive special education services, multilingual learner supports, or other specialized programming. As a result, district schools remain responsible for educating the highest-need students while facing reduced resources.

Testimony repeatedly highlighted that unchecked charter expansion can destabilize district budgets and worsen resource inequities, particularly in already underfunded public school systems. Supporters argued that the moratorium would give the state time to assess fiscal impacts and prioritize strengthening neighborhood public schools. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.



(Left) Members sign up to deliver testimony at the House Education Committee. (Right) RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro and PTU member/Cranston City Council speaking about negative impact of charter expansion on public education.

Charter Funding Study Commission

The House Education Committee heard testimony on H8131, a joint resolution creating a 13-member legislative commission to study Rhode Island’s method of funding charter schools and examine administrative costs across charter and traditional public school districts.

Supporters of the resolution noted that Rhode Island’s charter school funding structure has not undergone a comprehensive review in more than a decade, despite significant charter expansion and the creation of additional Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with separate administrative structures.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) in support of the resolution, emphasizing the need to evaluate the fiscal impact of charter expansion on district schools and local education budgets. Testimony also raised concerns about charter management fees that are paid to organizations outside Rhode Island, sending public education funding out of state rather than supporting local classrooms and student services. The bill was held for further study.

Hope Scholarship

The Senate Finance Committee heard testimony on the Governor’s FY2027 budget proposal supporting the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship at Rhode Island College, including changes that would remove the “pilot” designation and make the scholarship program permanent.

The Hope Scholarship helps Rhode Island students pursue four-year degrees at Rhode Island College, particularly in high-need workforce areas such as nursing, PreK–12 education, and the skilled trades. The program is intended to expand access to affordable higher education while helping the state develop the educated workforce needed to support Rhode Island’s economy.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) in support of the proposal, highlighting the importance of maintaining strong pathways into professions critical to Rhode Island communities, including nursing and public education.

Supporters emphasized that making the Hope Scholarship permanent would provide greater stability for students and families planning to attend Rhode Island College while strengthening the pipeline of professionals entering high-demand fields across the state.

The committee heard testimony as part of its review of the Governor's budget and will continue deliberations on the proposal as the FY2027 budget process moves forward.

Clean Air For Our Schools

The Senate Health & Human Services Committee heard testimony on S2873, legislation sponsored by Sen. Louis DiPalma establishing a statewide framework for monitoring and improving indoor air quality in Rhode Island's public schools.

The bill directs the Rhode Island Department of Health to establish science-based guidelines for environmental conditions in school buildings, including temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide levels, particulate matter, ventilation, and filtration. It would also incorporate indoor air quality assessments into the state's school facilities needs survey, requiring inspections of school ventilation systems and indoor air conditions at least every five years.

RIFTHP Field Representative Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) in support of the legislation, emphasizing that indoor air quality is a critical component of safe and healthy learning environments and directly affects student health, attendance, and learning conditions for educators and school staff.

On Thursday, March 12, Sencer also participated in the Indoor Air Quality Lobby Day at the State House, where advocates highlighted the need to improve ventilation and air quality in Rhode Island schools. Speakers emphasized that many school buildings are aging and lack modern HVAC systems, contributing to poor air quality that can worsen asthma, increase illness-related absences, and negatively impact student learning.



RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer speaking about school air quality

RIFTHP Lobby Day at the State House – April 28

RIFTHP will hold a Lobby Day at the Rhode Island State House on Tuesday, April 28, rescheduling the event that was postponed due to the February 26 blizzard.

Members from across Rhode Island will gather at the State House to advocate for RIFTHP's legislative priorities and speak directly with legislators about the issues affecting our schools, workplaces, and communities.

Lobby Day provides an important opportunity for members to engage directly in the legislative process and ensure policymakers hear firsthand from those most impacted by decisions made at Smith Hill.

We encourage members to join us on April 28 as we come together to make our voices heard at the State House.

This Week

- The House Education Committee will hear a bill creating a statewide policy allowing teachers to remove chronically disruptive or dangerous students from the classroom, requiring administrative review and a return-to-classroom plan before the student may return.
- The House Education Committee will hear legislation expanding the definition of “teacher” and creating a comprehensive bill of rights for school teachers.
- The House Education Committee will hear a bill that updates Rhode Island’s definition of dyslexia to align with current research on reading disabilities affecting word recognition, spelling accuracy, and reading speed.
- The House Labor Committee will hear a bill that extends prevailing wage and benefit protections to educators and administrators working in charter public schools and mayoral academies and creates enforcement mechanisms for violations.

Bill Introductions

School Facilities Bonds – Central Falls

([S3087](#), Acosta, Senate Finance)

([H8300](#), Giraldo, House Finance)

These bills authorize the City of Central Falls to issue up to \$25 million in bonds and notes to finance the construction, renovation, repair, furnishing, and equipping of school facilities in the city.

URI Medical School

([S3064](#), Sosnowski, Senate Health and Human Services)

This bill establishes a framework to create a medical school at the University of Rhode Island and provides an initial \$5 million appropriation as the first phase of a multi-year state investment to develop the program.

Teacher Dismissal After March 1 Deadline

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

This bill allows a school district to dismiss a teacher after the March 1 statutory notice deadline if the dismissal is based on gross misconduct involving a student.

Public Employee Collective Bargaining Authorization

([S2924](#), Thompson, Senate Labor and Gaming)

This bill allows public employees who are not currently represented by a union to form an employee organization and collectively bargain with their employer.

Stocking and Administering Medications at School

([S2855](#), Lauria, Senate Health and Human Services)

This bill allows students diagnosed with asthma or conditions that may cause bronchospasm or anaphylaxis to carry and self-administer asthma medication or epinephrine auto-injectors or intranasal epinephrine while at school.

Student Success Factor Increase

([S2826](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

([H8159](#), Casey, House Finance)

These bills increase the student success factor in the state education funding formula to 50 percent of the core instruction per-pupil amount for districts where more than 45 percent of students live in households at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

Student Success Factor Adequacy Review

([S2821](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

([H8158](#), Casey, House Finance)

These bills require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to review the components of the state education funding formula used to determine the level of aid needed to support high-need students.

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.



SUBSCRIBE

Register to receive the Smith Hill Report directly, [click here](#)