

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

April 20, 2026

Pension Improvement

The House Finance Committee held a hearing on a broad package of pension improvement legislation, including [H7160](#) (Rule of 85), [H7162](#) (service credit for medical leave and tax exemption for public pensions), [H7391](#) (full COLA restoration), [H7500](#) (final average salary for post-2009 employees), [H7683](#) (survivor benefit increase), [H8147](#) (CPI-based COLA restoration), and [H7390](#) (Rule of 90). The volume of bills before the committee underscored the scale of the damage done to Rhode Island's pension system and the growing urgency among workers to secure relief. All legislation was held for further study.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in person alongside Field Representative Jeremy Sencer, delivering a unified message on behalf of RIFTHP: workers kept their promises, and the state did not. Their testimony emphasized that public employees entered service with the clear understanding that their retirement would be secure, only to have that commitment fundamentally altered. They detailed the real and ongoing harm—delayed retirements, shrinking purchasing power, and financial instability for retirees—and stressed that for years, workers have returned to the State House seeking the return of benefits that were taken from them. Both made clear that continued acknowledgment is not enough, and that RIFTHP expects the General Assembly to take concrete steps this session to begin righting these wrongs.

Testimony throughout the hearing reinforced the urgency of action. Educators, healthcare workers, and retirees described the day-to-day consequences of reduced benefits, including difficult decisions about healthcare, housing, and basic needs. Speakers also connected pension policy to the state's growing workforce challenges, noting that Rhode Island is losing educators to neighboring states with stronger retirement systems—undermining stability in schools and negatively impacting students.

Committee members were engaged and acknowledged the concerns raised, while also pointing to fiscal considerations that will shape which proposals advance. While the bills were held for further study, the message from RIFTHP and allied workers was clear: the harm is ongoing, the need is urgent, and workers expect action—not delay—as the General Assembly considers pension legislation this session.



RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testifying in support of pension improvement legislation

Public Sector Union Neutrality

On Wednesday, the House Labor Committee heard testimony on [H7291](#), legislation that would allow workers to form a union through majority sign-up while requiring employer neutrality in the organizing process. The bill ensures that when a majority of employees demonstrate support, that decision is recognized without delay, and prohibits employers from encouraging or discouraging unionization.

RIFTHP Field Representative Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in person, outlining firsthand examples of employer interference in Rhode Island workplaces. His testimony highlighted patterns of coercion and misinformation in the charter school sector, including mandatory meetings where misleading anti-union messaging is delivered and intimidation tactics surrounding organizing efforts. He emphasized that these actions are happening in publicly funded institutions, raising serious concerns about the use of taxpayer dollars to undermine workers' rights.

Sencer also pointed to a fundamental contradiction in Rhode Island law and practice: while the state formally recognizes and supports collective bargaining, some employers—particularly charter operators—are actively working against unionization efforts. H7291 was framed as a necessary step to ensure that organizing outcomes reflect the genuine will of workers, rather than the result of employer-driven campaigns.

The bill was held for further study.

Right To Strike

On Wednesday, the House Labor Committee heard testimony on [H7042](#), legislation that would establish the right to strike for public sector workers in Rhode Island, including teachers, while maintaining existing prohibitions for police, firefighters, 911 personnel, and correctional officers. The bill represents a significant shift in Rhode Island labor law aimed at providing public employees with meaningful leverage when collective bargaining breaks down.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro submitted [written testimony](#) and testified in person in support of the bill, emphasizing that the right to strike is a last-resort tool that strengthens—not weakens—the collective bargaining process. She highlighted that most states either prohibit strikes or tightly regulate them, and where strikes are allowed, they are rare, short in duration, and often prevent prolonged labor disputes by encouraging timely, good-faith negotiations. Calabro also noted that when workers are denied legal pathways, conflicts still occur without structure, pointing to data showing a majority of recent teacher strikes have taken place in states where strikes are illegal.

Her testimony further connected the right to strike to improved student outcomes and school conditions, citing examples from other states where teachers have used strikes to secure smaller class sizes, increased access to nurses and counselors, and greater investment in student supports. She stressed that without this tool, employers can delay or avoid meaningful bargaining, creating prolonged disputes like those experienced in Providence, and argued that H7042 would restore balance, accountability, and fairness to the process.

Committee members raised questions about implementation and public impact, while testimony emphasized that the bill includes safeguards such as mediation and notice requirements common in other states. The hearing highlighted ongoing efforts by labor organizations to modernize Rhode Island labor law and ensure public workers have the tools necessary to secure fair contracts and maintain strong public services. The legislation was held for further study.

This Week

The General Assembly is in recess this week for April break and will return next week as the legislative session enters a critical period. Key decisions on major issues are expected in the coming weeks.

Bill Introductions

Transition Planning for Students with 504 Plans

([H 8462](#), Cortvriend, House Education)

This bill would require school districts to provide transition planning for students with disabilities who have a Section 504 plan, similar to the transition planning currently required for students with individualized education programs (IEPs). Transition planning would begin by age fourteen (14) or younger if appropriate and be reviewed annually.

School Bus Safety Enforcement

([S 2392](#), Britto, Senate Judiciary)

This bill would allow parents or guardians to access GPS data from school buses or other motor vehicles used to transport students to and from school, providing increased visibility into student transportation.

Superintendent Terms

([H 7904](#), Kislak, House Education)

([S 2407](#), Valverde, Senate Labor & Gaming)

These bills would increase the maximum term of employment for a school superintendent from three (3) years to five (5) years.

Municipal Employees' Arbitration

([H 7082](#), Bennett, House Labor)

([S 2409](#), Thompson, Senate Labor & Gaming)

These bills would expand the use of binding arbitration for municipal employees and establish additional factors for arbitrators to consider, including comparisons of wages and working conditions in similarly skilled occupations.

School Defunding Via Choice Scheme

([S 2434](#), Paolino, Senate Education)

This bill would permit students attending schools designated as failing to enroll in any public school and would establish the Rhode Island education revitalization fund to support a school choice program.

School Pesticide Control

([H 7343](#), Carson, House Education)

([S 2439](#), Vargas, Senate Environment & Agriculture)

These bills would restrict the application of pesticides and rodenticides at schools and childcare centers and require schools to provide notice to parents and guardians.

Inspection of Personnel Files

([H 7442](#), Shanley, House Labor)

([S 2498](#), Burke, Senate Labor & Gaming)

These bills would expand employer obligations to create, maintain, and retain employee personnel records, require retention for at least three (3) years after termination, and increase financial penalties for violations.

Workplace Psychological Safety Act

([H 7121](#), Lombardi, House Labor)

([S 2502](#), Ciccone, Senate Labor & Gaming)

These bills would prohibit psychological abuse in the workplace by employers or co-workers, establish protections and civil remedies for employees, and impose penalties on employers based on revenue.

Lobby Day

On **Tuesday, April 28 at 3:30 PM**, educators, school staff, and public employees from across Rhode Island will come together for our AFT Lobby Day. With key decisions being made right now, it is essential that legislators hear directly from the people who work in our schools every day.

We know this time can be especially challenging for elementary educators, but it is also when legislators are most accessible—and when your voice can have the greatest impact.

This is not just a show of presence—this is about direct conversations with lawmakers. When members meet face-to-face with legislators, it makes an impact. It shapes decisions. It moves legislation.

We will be advocating for a charter school moratorium and cap reduction, Rule of 90 pension improvements, and classroom safety legislation—and your voice is critical in those conversations. Materials will be available for members to share with legislators, making it easy to participate and ensure our message is heard.

We will begin with a brief gathering in the State House Bell Area, then head directly to the House and Senate chambers to meet with legislators.

Whether you're new to this or have done it before, you will be supported every step of the way.

Now is the time to step forward. Our strength is in our numbers—and in our willingness to show up and speak directly to those making decisions.

Be there. Be heard. April 28 at 3:30 PM.

Take Action!

[Email Your Legislator - Stop Charter Expansion!](#)

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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