The
SMITH HILL REPORT
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Senate Approves RIFTHP Priority Classroom Safety Legislation

One of RIFTHP's top legislative priorities cleared a major hurdle this week as the Rhode Island Senate approved **S 2524**, legislation designed to strengthen classroom safety while protecting the rights of both students and educators, on a 32-5 vote.

Sponsored by Senators Brian Thompson, LaMountain, Bissaillon, Urso, and Patalano, the bill establishes clearer procedures for addressing serious classroom disruptions and safety concerns while creating safeguards for students when classroom removals occur. The legislation is intended to provide educators with meaningful tools to maintain safe and productive learning environments while ensuring appropriate protections remain in place for students.

RIFTHP supported the legislation throughout the legislative process. President Maribeth Calabro submitted **written testimony** and testified before the Senate Education Committee. Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified on behalf of the union, and Woonsocket Teachers Guild President Robert Stewart joined educators in urging passage of the bill. Together, they highlighted the impact classroom disruptions and safety concerns have on student learning, educator retention, and school climate.

The bill first advanced out of the Senate Education Committee before receiving strong bipartisan support on the Senate floor. The vote reflects growing recognition among lawmakers that classroom conditions have become a significant concern for educators, students, and families throughout Rhode Island.

Classroom safety has consistently been one of RIFTHP's highest legislative priorities this session. Members have repeatedly identified disruptive behavior, safety concerns, and the lack of clear intervention procedures as factors contributing to educator burnout, staff shortages, and challenges in maintaining effective learning environments.

With Senate approval secured, attention now turns to the House companion bill, **H 7526**, where advocates will continue pushing for passage before the General Assembly adjourns. While Senate passage represents significant momentum for the proposal, additional work remains before the legislation can become law. RIFTHP will continue advocating for final passage in the closing weeks of the legislative session.

House Finance Advances FY 2027 State Budget

The House Finance Committee has approved a $15.2 billion Fiscal Year 2027 state budget that increases education funding, expands healthcare investments, provides relief for working families, and makes significant investments in housing, workforce development, and higher education. The budget now moves to the full House of Representatives for consideration before advancing to the Senate.

For public education, one of the most significant provisions is an increase in the Student Success Factor from 40 percent to 43 percent. The Student Success Factor provides additional state aid for students living in poverty and directs more resources to districts serving the highest concentrations of student need. House Finance added more than $24 million above the Governor's proposal to fully fund direct state education aid and support the increase, providing additional resources to communities educating large numbers of economically disadvantaged students.

The budget also returns immediate control of the Central Falls School District to the City of Central Falls, ending more than three decades of state oversight and marking a major milestone in the district's transition back to local governance.

For higher education, the budget authorizes a $275 million bond question that would appear on the November ballot. The proposal includes $165 million for a new Integrated Health Building at the University of Rhode Island, $60 million for a Workforce Innovation Center at CCRI's Warwick campus, and $50 million to renovate Rhode Island College's Adams Library into a student success and career readiness center. The budget would also extend Rhode Island College's Hope Scholarship for an additional three years.

The budget also addresses charter school funding by extending the current 14 percent limitation on certain charter tuition funding adjustments for FY 2027 while creating an exception for mayoral academies serving students from fewer than four approved sending districts. House Finance did not adopt separate legislation that would have eliminated the 14 percent limitation entirely. The issue has been particularly important to communities such as Woonsocket, where district leaders have argued that charter tuition obligations place increasing pressure on local school budgets.

Beyond education, the budget includes several significant investments affecting Rhode Islanders, including support for hospitals and healthcare providers, a new refundable child tax credit, expanded childcare eligibility, and a $120 million housing and community development bond to support affordable housing and homeownership programs. The proposal also establishes an independent Office of the Inspector General and includes other government accountability measures.

Retirement security remains one of the largest unresolved issues of the legislative session. After more than 6,500 messages from educators and public employees supporting Rule of 90 legislation, advocates are watching closely to see whether legislative leaders incorporate pension improvements into the final budget agreement. As the budget moves through the remainder of the legislative process, RIFTHP will continue advocating for retirement security improvements, strong public school funding, and investments that support educators, healthcare professionals, and the students and communities they serve.

Voucher Firewall

The Senate Finance Committee heard legislation that would prohibit Rhode Island from participating in a federal school voucher tax credit program unless participation is explicitly approved by both the General Assembly and the Governor.

RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer submitted **written testimony** in support of the legislation, arguing that major decisions affecting education funding should be subject to legislative review, public debate, and democratic accountability. The testimony emphasized concerns that voucher-style programs could divert resources away from public schools and undermine stable funding for students, educators, and school communities.

Supporters argued that **S 2139** establishes an important safeguard by ensuring Rhode Island cannot participate in a federal voucher tax credit program without affirmative approval from elected state policymakers. They also stressed the importance of protecting investments in public education and maintaining transparency around any proposal that could redirect education funding.

The committee recommended the bill be held for further study and scheduled the legislation for additional consideration on June 2.

Senate Confirms New Members to Rhode Island Board of Education

The Rhode Island Senate this week confirmed four new members of the Rhode Island Board of Education following nominations by Governor Dan McKee, bringing new voices from education, labor, workforce development, and public service to the state's education policymaking structure.

Joining the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education are former Senate Education Committee Chair Sandra Cano and Karen Hazard, Secretary-Treasurer of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO and President of the Rhode Island Laborers' District Council. Cano brings extensive experience in education policy, having previously served on the Pawtucket School Committee, Pawtucket City Council, and in the Rhode Island Senate, where she was a leading advocate for educational opportunity and workforce development. Hazard adds a strong labor perspective and decades of experience representing working Rhode Islanders.

The Senate also confirmed Alan Tenreiro, President of Mount Saint Charles Academy and former Cumberland High School principal, and Dr. Arthur-Paul Petrosinelli, a former teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent, to the Council on Postsecondary Education. Together, they bring decades of experience in public education, school leadership, and workforce development.

For educators and school employees, the appointments may bring a renewed focus on oversight and accountability within Rhode Island's education system. Several of the new members have extensive experience in public education, labor, and public service—backgrounds that could contribute to more rigorous review of education policy decisions and stronger expectations for results from state education leadership.

The confirmations come as Rhode Island continues to confront major education challenges, including school funding reform, educator recruitment and retention, multilingual learner supports, higher education affordability, and the transition of Providence Public Schools back to local control after more than six years of state control.

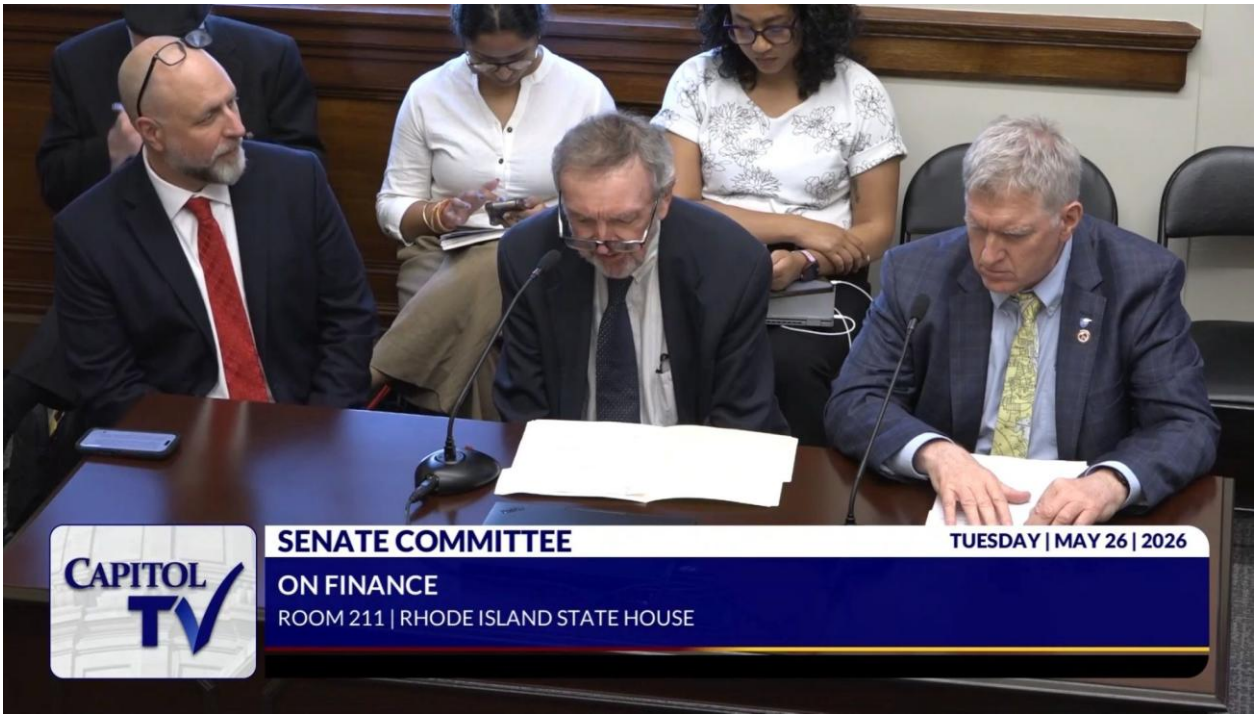
RIFTHP congratulates the newly confirmed members and looks forward to working with them to strengthen public education, support educators, and ensure Rhode Island students receive the resources and opportunities they deserve.

Adjunct Access To Healthcare

RIFTHP Field Representative Michael Mullane, Rhode Island College Adjunct Faculty Union President Joseph Szpila, and RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified in support of the legislation. Mullane and Sencer also submitted **written testimony** on behalf of the union.

Drawing on nearly two decades of representing Rhode Island College adjunct faculty, Mullane told lawmakers that the union has sought healthcare coverage for adjunct faculty during every round of contract negotiations since organizing in 2007. According to Mullane, college administrators have consistently maintained that state law does not permit adjunct participation in the state health insurance program because eligibility is currently tied to weekly work hours rather than teaching load.

Szpila described the important role adjunct faculty play in delivering instruction and supporting students throughout Rhode Island's public higher education system. Sencer emphasized that adjunct faculty create educational opportunities for thousands of Rhode Island students and deserve access to the same healthcare benefits available to other state employees performing comparable work. Supporters argued that the bill would simply apply the same half-time standard already used elsewhere in state employment by making adjunct faculty eligible for benefits when they teach at least half of a full-time faculty workload. The committee recommended the bill be held for further study.



(L-R) RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer, RIC Adjunct President Joseph Szpila, and RIFTHP Field Representative Mike Mullane providing testimony on legislation to give adjunct faculty access to healthcare.

This Week

- On Tuesday, June 2, the Senate Education Committee will consider legislation that would temporarily halt new charter school approvals and expansions and reduce Rhode Island's charter school cap.

- On Tuesday, June 2, the Senate Finance Committee will consider legislation that would require legislative approval before Rhode Island could participate in a federal school voucher tax credit program, ensuring public review of any proposal that could redirect education funding away from public schools.

- On Tuesday, June 2, the House Finance Committee will consider legislation that would allow state employee unions to negotiate longevity pay through collective bargaining, restoring the issue as a subject of contract negotiations between employees and the state.

Take Action

Action Network Link: Email your legislators and tell them to pass Rule of 90!

Action Network Link: Email your legislators and tell them to pass the charter moratorium and cap reduction!

Call the Governor, Speaker, and Senate President today and tell them to support the Charter Moratorium & Cap Reduction (S2787/H7415) and Rule of 90 (H7390/S3251).

Governor McKee	**(401) 222-2080**
Speaker Blazejewski	**(401) 222-2466**
Senate President Lawson	**(401) 222-4901**

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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