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# SMITH HILL REPORT



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## Revenue for Rhode Islanders

On Thursday, February 5, the Revenue for Rhode Islanders Coalition held a press event and lobby day at the State House to promote legislation that would increase taxes on income over \$625,000, raising more than \$200 million annually for public investment. The proposals, sponsored by Senator Murray and Representative Alzate, aim to ensure Rhode Island's highest earners pay their fair share to support education, healthcare, food assistance, childcare, and public transportation.

RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro spoke at the event, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable funding in public schools. The RIFTHP is a founding member of the coalition and has long advocated for a more equitable tax structure that supports Rhode Island's students, families, and essential services.



*Top: Members of Pawtucket Teachers Alliance With RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro.  
Bottom (L-R) Senate Sponsor Melissa Murray, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro, House Sponsor Karen Alzate*

## **Student Success Factor Increase – FY 2027 Budget**

On February 5, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the House Finance Committee in support of Article 7 of H 7127, the FY 2027 state budget. RIFTHP expressed strong support for the Governor's proposal to increase the Student Success Factor from 40% to 43%, directing an additional \$14.4 million in education funding to students living in poverty.

Sencer emphasized that RIFTHP has long advocated for a more equitable funding formula and that this targeted investment will directly benefit high-poverty districts including Providence, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Pawtucket, and Newport. He highlighted how the change strengthens Rhode Island's commitment to equity and ensures that state education aid is better aligned with student needs.

Sencer also highlighted the fiscal inefficiencies created by decades of unchecked charter expansion, which have led to a fragmented, parallel public school system. He noted that Rhode Island now supports more than 60 superintendents and layers of redundant administrative staff—an expensive duplication that diverts critical resources away from district classrooms. He further underscored that large charter management organizations often fail to serve high-need special education students, reinforcing the urgent need for state investments that prioritize equity and ensure public funds reach the students who need them most.

## **RIFTHP State House Rally — February 26**

RIFTHP members will rally inside the State House on Thursday, February 26, from 3:30–5:00 PM in support of our legislative priorities, including pension improvements, charter reform and accountability, protecting our classrooms, and improved working conditions. A brief speaking program will take place from 3:45–4:00 PM. A powerful member presence sends a clear message to lawmakers: it's time to act on the issues that matter most to Rhode Island educators and students.

## **This Week**

- The House Education Committee will consider a bill that extends teacher certifications without fee or penalty for three or five years for teachers who hold certifications as of July 1, 2026.
- The House Finance Committee will review budget items related to higher education facilities and the Hope Scholarship.
- The House Corporations will consider a bill that allows private employees at nursing homes, developmental disability and home care providers whose salaries are 90% funded with federal or state monies to be eligible to opt into the state healthcare plan.
- The House Judiciary Committee will consider a bill that adds school superintendents, central office officials, school principals, and all other school employees, to the definition of a "public official" for purposes of the criminal prohibition against making threats to public officials.

## Bill Introductions

### Student and Teacher Classroom Safety

([H 7526](#), Read, House Education)

This bill allows teachers to remove students from the classroom for chronic disruption or immediate threats to safety. It establishes a clear return-to-classroom plan process with teacher input, protects educators from retaliation, and ensures due process and disability rights protections for students. School districts must adopt policies and report annual data to RIDE, disaggregated by race, gender, grade level, and disability status.

### Student Mental and Behavioral Health Categorical Aid

([H 7455](#), Furtado, House Finance)

This bill creates a new categorical funding stream to support student mental and behavioral health. It requires the state to provide school districts with additional aid equal to 2% of total district expenditures to hire and retain staff such as school social workers, counselors, psychologists, paraprofessionals, behavioral specialists, and registered behavior techs (RBTs). To qualify, districts must be below recommended staffing ratios and meet specific behavioral intervention and accountability requirements.

### Final Average Salary Adjustment for Post-2009 Retirees

([H 7500](#), Shanley, House Finance)

This bill changes the retirement benefit calculation date for teachers and state employees by moving the cutoff from July 1, 2024, back to July 1, 2009. It applies to members eligible to retire on or after the new July 1, 2009, cutoff date.

### Teachers' Bill of Rights

([H 7529](#), O'Brien, House Education)

This bill creates a Teachers' Bill of Rights, affirming educators' right to a safe and respectful work environment, protection from harassment and retaliation, academic freedom, and professional autonomy. It also prohibits requiring teachers to spend personal funds on classroom supplies and expands the legal definition of "teacher" to include school nurses, counselors, and administrators.

### Classroom Interference And Censorship

([S 2435](#), E. Morgan, Senate Education)

This bill enables parents to review public school learning materials and object if the parent decides that the material is harmful. Also a parent may withdraw their student from the activity or class where the material is used and request an alternative assignment.

### School Choice

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

This bill permits students enrolled in the bottom 15% of public schools to transfer to any public school with available capacity, with funding following the student. Establishes the Rhode Island Education Revitalization Fund, financed by a new property tax on private college and university endowments, to support transportation and other costs associated with the school choice program.

### **No Sales Tax On School Supplies**

([H 7596](#), Hopkins, House Finance)

This bill exempts from the sales tax eligible school supplies costing less than \$50.00, if purchased within one week prior to the start of the academic year.

### **School Indoor Air Quality**

([H 7582](#), Cotter, House Finance)

This bill requires inspections and evaluations of the indoor air quality of each school building, including heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems.

### **Special Waiver For Charter School Instruction**

([H 7525](#), Place, House Education)

This bill allows charter schools to engage in nontraditional approaches to learning.

### **School Waste Recycling And Refuse Disposal**

([S 2438](#), Valverde, Senate Environment and Agriculture)

This bill amends provisions related to school waste recycling and refuse disposal and requires waste audit reports from educational entities and program participation reports from vendors.

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### **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](mailto:jsencer@rifthp.org).

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