

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Honoring James Parisi: A Career of Integrity, Insight, and Impact

On February 10, 2026, the Rhode Island General Assembly celebrated the retirement of James Parisi, lobbyist for the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP), with the unanimous passage of [House Resolution 7600](#) and [Senate Resolution 2510](#).

Parisi's retirement marks the close of an extraordinary three-decade career defined by integrity, deep policy knowledge, and unwavering commitment to Rhode Island's public sector workers. As the chief lobbyist for RIFTHP, he has been a daily, respected presence at the State House, advancing the interests of over 10,000 educators, nurses, higher education staff, and public employees.

The resolutions, introduced by Representative Deborah Fellela and Senator Hanna Gallo, respectively, praised Parisi's "honesty and abiding integrity," as well as his mastery of complex issues such as education, healthcare, pensions, and labor policy. Legislators from both chambers commended his collegiality, his readiness to work with all parties, and his unique ability to serve as a "trusted source of information and opinions on the vexing issues of the day."

In addition to his legislative advocacy, Parisi also served as a field representative for six local unions, providing hands-on support to members navigating contract negotiations, grievances, and policy implementation.

Parisi was joined at the State House on February 10th by his wife, family, and close friends as both chambers stood in applause to honor his legacy.

"On behalf of the staff and members of RIFTHP, we extend our deepest gratitude to James Parisi for more than thirty years of unwavering dedication and service," said RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro. "Jim has been a true champion of workers' rights. Through his tireless legislative efforts, relentless daily advocacy, and skilled negotiations, he has been a cornerstone of progress for the labor movement. As a consummate professional, he has earned the profound respect of the General Assembly, where he is known as a trusted and reliable voice. His strong ethics and integrity have set a standard for all who work in the halls of government, ensuring that the rights of working people are never forgotten. On a personal note, his institutional knowledge and calm demeanor have been deeply appreciated by everyone at RIFTHP. It has been an honor and a privilege to learn from the vast knowledge and expertise he has shared so graciously. We thank him for a lifetime of service that has truly made a difference and wish him a retirement filled with family, peace, and the pride of a job exceptionally well done."

“I have had the privilege and the pleasure of working closely with Jim for over twenty years,” said former RIFTHP President Frank Flynn. “He is a consummate professional in every endeavor he undertakes. As a lobbyist, Jim is highly regarded and well respected by both his friends and his foes. I thank him for his decades of outstanding service to the RIFTHP, the labor community, and Rhode Island’s working families—and for his loyal friendship.”

As James Parisi steps away from his official duties, the entire RIFTHP community extends heartfelt gratitude and admiration. His legacy will endure in the laws he helped pass, the relationships he built, and the standards he set for advocacy rooted in knowledge, respect, and justice.

We wish him a joyful retirement filled with family, peace, and pride in a job exceptionally well done.



RIFTHP Field Representative James Parisi, surrounded by family and friends as he was honored at the State House

Hope Scholarship – FY 2027 Budget

On February 11, 2026, Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) President Maribeth Calabro testified before the House Finance Committee in support of [H 7127](#) Article 7, legislation to make the Rhode Island Hope Scholarship permanent. Calabro also submitted [written testimony](#) on behalf of RIFTHP, which has identified the Hope Scholarship as a legislative priority.

Calabro emphasized that the Hope Scholarship has already demonstrated measurable success, noting that more than 200 Rhode Island College students were able to continue their education in its first year. She highlighted reported increases in retention and on-time graduation rates among scholarship recipients and underscored the program's impact on first-generation college students, students facing financial hardship, and students of color.

Calabro further stressed that the scholarship is a targeted, last-dollar investment that strengthens Rhode Island's workforce pipeline in high-need fields such as education, healthcare, behavioral health, and social services. She urged lawmakers to make the program permanent, arguing that doing so reinforces Rhode Island's longstanding commitment to public higher education, economic opportunity, and workforce development.

Threats Against School Employees

On February 10, 2026, RIFTHP Field Representative Jeremy Sencer submitted [written testimony](#) to the House Judiciary Committee in support of [H 7552](#), legislation extending criminal protections against threats to school employees. Sencer stated that the bill expands the definition of "public official" to include superintendents, central office administrators, principals, and all school employees, ensuring educators and staff receive the same legal protections as other public officials. He noted RIFTHP has supported similar legislation in prior sessions. The bill applies only when an individual age eighteen or older knowingly and willfully makes a threat to kill or cause bodily harm to a school employee or their immediate family. Sencer said the measure strengthens deterrence, supports safe learning environments, and provides prosecutors with a clear tool to address serious threats.

Bill Introductions

Charter School Prevailing Wages

([S 2634](#), Bissaillon, Senate Labor & Gaming)

This bill provides educators and administrators employed in Charter Public Schools and Mayoral Academies with prevailing wage and benefits oversight. It also establishes recourse for violations of prevailing wage and benefit requirements.

Inter-District CTE & Pathway Coordination

([S 2625](#), McKenney, Senate Labor & Gaming)

This bill provides for improved communication and coordination between sending and receiving school districts regarding students participating in Career and Technical Education (CTE) or Pathway Programs.

School Meals Payment Fee Restrictions

([S 2635](#), Lawson, Senate Education)

This bill prohibits transaction fees for school meal payments in all school districts. It requires that at least one no-fee payment method be made available and mandates full disclosure if a payment platform charges fees.

School Privatization

([S 2556](#), de la Cruz, Senate Finance)

This bill establishes a new educational program that allows students to enroll in public and private schools of their choice.

School Voucher Accounts

([S 2540](#), Morgan, Senate Finance)

This bill establishes a new program where per pupil funding, calculated annually by RIDE, would be transferred into a newly created education funding account administered by the Children's Scholarship Fund to pay for approved educational expenses.

Repeal of Statewide Standards

([S 2528](#), Morgan, Senate Education)

This bill repeals the establishment of statewide academic standards for core subjects and eliminates the requirement that such standards be implemented into the curriculum of all public schools.

Universal Free School Meals

([H 7793](#), Caldwell, House Finance)

This bill establishes a statewide "healthy school meals for all" program providing universal free breakfast and lunch to students in Rhode Island public schools, phased in over three years.

Five Year Emergency Certification

([H 7728](#), O'Brien, House Education)

This bill allows emergency preliminary teaching certificates to be issued for up to a total of five (5) school years.

Survivor Benefit Increase

([H 7683](#), McEntee, House Finance)

This bill increases the monthly minimum survivor benefit payable to a spouse, domestic partner, or former spouse under the teachers' retirement system.

Pre-K Expansion

([H 7680](#), Donovan, House Finance)

This bill specifies that pre-kindergarten programs for three (3) and four (4) year-olds be included in programs designed to increase access to voluntary, free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.

All-Charter School Districts

([H 7615](#), Place, House Education)

This bill permits local communities to adopt an all-charter public school district model upon approval by the local municipal council and school committee, and an affirmative vote at a special or general election.

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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