
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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As the 2026 legislative session gets fully underway, RIFTHP has been busy at the State House meeting with key sponsors, finalizing bill language, and preparing our priority legislation for introduction. These early efforts help ensure our bills are filed strategically and backed by strong legislative support.

We are also closely monitoring the release of Governor McKee's FY 2027 proposed state budget, which is expected to be highlighted in his State of the State address on Tuesday, January 13, 2026. The Governor's proposal will shape legislative debate around education and healthcare funding in the coming months.

Below is an overview of RIFTHP's top legislative priorities for the 2026 session, along with the leadership and committee assignments in both chambers of the General Assembly.

RIFTHP 2026 Legislative Priorities

Rule of 90 Retirement Bill

Allows public employees to retire with full benefits when age plus years of service equals 90. This fair and realistic retirement path especially supports those who began working young. It corrects inequities created by the 2011 pension overhaul and aligns Rhode Island with national retirement norms for public service.

Student and Teacher Classroom Safety Act

Gives educators the authority to remove students who are chronically disruptive or pose an immediate threat. Requires meaningful teacher input before the student's return and ensures timely follow-up. The bill protects student rights and prohibits retaliation against staff for exercising safety measures.

Charter School Moratorium Act

Establishes a three-year moratorium on new or expanded charter schools, including mayoral academies. It also reduces the statewide cap on charter schools from 35 to 25, providing time to assess the impact of charter expansion on district budgets and student populations.

Charter School Funding Study Commission

Creates a 13-member legislative commission to conduct a comprehensive review of charter school funding formulas and administrative spending. The commission will issue a final report and recommendations to the General Assembly by April 1, 2027, ensuring future decisions are grounded in fiscal transparency and equity.

Charter School Teacher and Administrator Prevailing Wage

Requires RIDE to publish information related to charter school teacher and administrator prevailing wages.

Legislative Leadership & Committee Chairs (2026 Session)

Rhode Island Senate

Leadership

- President of the Senate: Senator Valarie J. Lawson (D)
- President Pro Tempore: Senator Hanna M. Gallo (D)
- Majority Leader: Senator Frank A. Ciccone III (D)
- Majority Whip: Senator David Tikoian (D)
- Minority Leader: Senator Jessica de la Cruz (R)

Key Committee Chairs

- Education: Senator Hanna M. Gallo (D)
- Finance: Senator Louis P. DiPalma (D)
- Health & Human Services: Senator Melissa Murray (D)
- Judiciary: Senator Matthew L. LaMountain (D)
- Commerce: Senator Robert Britto (D)
- Environment & Agriculture: Senator V. Susan Sosnowski (D)
- Labor & Gaming: Senator John P. Burke (D)
- Rules, Government Ethics & Oversight: Senator Mark McKenney (D)

Rhode Island House of Representatives

Leadership

- Speaker of the House: Representative K. Joseph Shekarchi (D)
- Majority Leader: Representative Christopher R. Blazejewski (D)
- Speaker Pro Tempore: Representative Brian Patrick Kennedy (D)
- Deputy Speaker: Representative Raymond Hull (D)
- Majority Whip: Representative Katherine Kazarian (D)
- Minority Leader: Representative Michael W. Chippendale (R)

Key Committee Chairs

- Education: Representative Joseph McNamara (D)
- Finance: Representative Marvin Abney (D)
- Health and Human Services: Representative Susan Donovan (D)
- Conduct: Representative Justine Caldwell (D)
- Corporations: Representative Joseph Solomon Jr. (D)
- Environment & Natural Resources: Representative David Bennett (D)
- Judiciary: Representative Carol Hagan McEntee (D)
- Labor: Representative Arthur Corvese (D)



RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer with key Senate bill sponsors Brian Thompson and Melissa Murray

Bill Introductions

Media Literacy in Civics Standards

([S2016](#) Euer, Senate Education)

This bill adds *media literacy* to the civic education standards currently taught in K–12 public schools, which include the history of Rhode Island, representative government, the rights and duties of actively engaged citizenship, and the principles of democracy.

Uniform School Start Date

([S2017](#) Acosta, Senate Education)

This bill requires that the school year for all public schools — including traditional public schools, public charter schools, independent charter schools, and mayoral academies — begin on the same calendar date statewide each year.

Anti-Hazing Policy in Student Athletics

([H7 003](#), McNamara, House Education)

This bill directs the Rhode Island Department of Education to establish a statewide anti-hazing policy for student athletics. The policy would provide consistent guidance to school districts to prevent hazing, promote student safety, and foster respectful team environments across Rhode Island schools.

Constitutional Right to an Adequate Education

([SJR 2018](#), Acosta, Senate Education)

This joint resolution proposes a constitutional amendment to guarantee Rhode Island residents an equal opportunity to receive an education that is adequate, equitable, and meaningful, and provides for judicial enforcement of this right.

One Percent Funding Reduction Cap

([S 2025](#), Rogers, Senate Finance)

This bill amends the education funding formula and prohibits total education aid paid to any local education agency from being reduced by more than one percent (1%) of the prior year's municipal education appropriation.

Arming of Campus Police

([S 2053](#), Appollonio, Senate Judiciary)

This bill requires campus police at public institutions of higher education to be armed and includes campus police in the definition of "law enforcement officer" for purposes of the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights.

Urban Collaborative Governance Reform

([H 7023](#), Lombardi, House Education)

This bill amends the composition of the Urban Collaborative and provides that the collaborative be governed by a board of trustees.

Transportation for Students Living Two Miles from School

([H 7025](#), Lombardi, House Education)

This bill requires school committees to provide transportation for any student who resides two (2) or more miles from their school.

AED and Emergency Response Requirements in Schools

([H 7027](#), Noret, House Education)

This bill expands the requirement that all public and private middle schools and high schools maintain a functional automated external defibrillator (AED) on site and establish a cardiac emergency response plan.

Student Device Location Privacy Protections

([H 7032](#), Speakman, House Innovation, Internet & Technology)

This bill prohibits school districts and educational institutions from accessing or using location data from a student's school-issued or personal device, except in limited circumstances.

Workforce Certificate Program Eligibility for Promise Scholarship

([H 7052](#), Azzinaro, House Finance)

This bill expands eligibility for the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to include students enrolled in workforce-ready certificate programs at the Community College of Rhode Island.

Creditable Service for Teachers on Medical or Parental Leave

([H 7053](#), Donovan, House Finance)

This bill allows a teacher who takes unpaid parental or medical leave to receive a full year of creditable service if the teacher worked a minimum of 135 school days during that school year.

Expansion of High-Quality Public Prekindergarten

([H 7054](#), McNamara, House Finance)

This bill establishes guidelines for the continued implementation and expansion of public, high-quality prekindergarten education programs.

State Employee Collective Bargaining for Longevity Pay

([H 7055](#), Corvese, House Finance)

This bill allows state union employees, beginning July 1, 2026, to negotiate longevity payments as part of their collective bargaining agreements.

Social Security Income Tax Relief

([H 7057](#), Ackerman, House Finance)

This bill phases in modifications to federal adjusted gross income for Social Security income over five years, increasing the exemption from twenty percent (20%) to one hundred percent (100%) beginning January 1, 2027.

Questions

RIFTHP members with questions about the Smith Hill Report or our legislative agenda may reach out to RIFTHP Lobbyist James Parisi at (401) 273-9800 or at jparisi@rifthp.org.

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