

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

April 14, 2025

Charter School Network Moratorium

On April 10, 2025, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro, Woonsocket Teachers' Guild President Robert Stewart, and Providence Teachers Union COPE Chair Patrick Shelton testified before the House Committee on Education in support of [H 6034](#), which would prohibit the creation or expansion of network-style charter schools in Rhode Island. Calabro also submitted [written testimony](#) on behalf of RIFTHP.

Calabro spoke against the growth of "big box" charter networks that siphon public education dollars to out-of-state management companies, emphasizing the need to keep Rhode Island's education funding within local communities. Stewart shared that Woonsocket's city council and school committee oppose network charter expansion, warning that it creates a parallel school district structure that duplicates administrative functions and shifts resources away from students. Shelton underscored the importance of protecting the rights and resources of families and students in traditional public schools.

Greg Mancini, a state special education adjudicator, and Tim Duffy, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Association of School Committees, also testified in support of the bill. Both raised concerns about discriminatory enrollment practices at some charter schools that fail to serve high-need students. Mancini also noted that some charters do not pay prevailing wages for construction projects.

The bill was opposed by RIDE, the Rhode Island League of Charter Schools, and Stop The Wait. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.



*Maribeth Calabro, President, RIFTHP and Robert Stewart, President, Woonsocket Teachers' Guild
testifying at the State House in Support of Charter School Network Moratorium*

Charter School Union Neutrality

On Tuesday April 8, the RIFTHP offered verbal and [written testimony](#) in support of legislation requiring charter schools to be neutral when staff are considering forming a union. [H 5840](#) by Senator Casey was heard in the House Education Committee. Testifying in support of the bill was RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi and NEA/RI lobbyist Erich Haslehurst. Andy Andrade testified in opposition to the bill on behalf of RIDE. The League of Charter Schools and the RI Education Collaborative (a pro-charter organization) submitted letters in opposition to the bill

H 5840 would require District charter schools and Independent charter schools to include a union neutrality clause at the time the school applies for a new charter or the renewal of an existing charter. The bill also permits union recognition through a card check process. The RIFTHP testimony centered on the inadequacy of private sector labor law to protect workers trying to form unions. Since federal labor law is inadequate, the RIFTHP urged passage of a state law to protect charter school workers seeking to unionize. Parisi informed the committee that the RIFTHP had organized workers at the Paul Cuffee Charter School this school year, and we are currently working to negotiate their first contract.

While the RIFTHP did not cite recent examples of anti-union coercion, he did note that each charter school has its own leadership of an unelected self-appointed Board that could use money or make efforts to coerce workers not to form a union. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Additional Required Teacher Training

On April 9, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee in opposition to [S 392](#), which would require 80% of Rhode Island teachers to complete Basic Emergency and Response Skills (BEARS) training within three years. While supporting the goal of enhanced emergency preparedness, RIFTHP emphasized that this mandate adds a significant burden to an already saturated professional development system. Sencer shared stories and examples from the long list of mandatory trainings educators already complete each year, including a light-hearted mention of the annual bloodborne pathogens video. He also submitted [written testimony](#) urging a more sustainable approach that respects educators' time and system capacity. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

On April 9, 2025, RIFTHP Lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified before the Senate Education Committee on [S 637](#), the Seizure Safe Schools Act. RIFTHP expressed support for the bill's intent to ensure students with seizure disorders receive timely and effective care. Sencer focused his testimony on the need to ensure that any training or administration of seizure medication by non-medical staff remains strictly voluntary and supported with legal protections. He raised concerns about proposed mandatory training requirements for all school personnel, citing the burden of growing state mandates on educators. He urged the committee to amend the bill to explicitly state that seizure response training is voluntary. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Teacher Tenure Deadline

On April 9, 2025, the Senate Labor and Gaming Committee heard testimony on [S 753](#), which would amend the Teacher Tenure Act to permit dismissal after the March 1 deadline in cases of “gross misconduct.” RIFTHP submitted [written testimony](#) in opposition to the bill.

RIFTHP Field Representative Jeremy Sencer warned that the bill introduces an undefined and subjective standard that opens the door to misuse. He cited the fallout from the 2019 changes to Rhode Island’s mandatory reporting law, when dozens of Providence educators were removed from classrooms due to unclear guidance—only to be cleared of wrongdoing after the fact. Sencer argued that “gross misconduct” is similarly vague and risks inconsistent enforcement, selective discipline, and even retaliation.

RIFTHP emphasized that school districts already have the authority to place staff on administrative leave when misconduct is suspected and urged lawmakers to pursue policy grounded in clear definitions and fair oversight. The committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Striker’s Benefits

The RIFTHP signed up to support (without testimony) legislation to permit workers who are on strike or who are locked out of work to collect unemployment insurance. [H 5680](#) by freshman Representative Furtado was heard in the House Labor Committee on Wednesday, April 9. The AFL-CIO and other unions offered support to reinstate an unemployment insurance benefit that was eliminated by the Assembly over thirty years ago. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

This Week

The House and Senate are not meeting this week. Committee hearings and floor sessions will resume on April 22.

Bill Introductions

Tax Exempt School Supplies

([S 435](#), Paolino, Senate Finance)

([H 5787](#), Hopkins, House Finance)

These bills would exempt from the sales tax eligible school supplies, costing less than thirty dollars (\$30.00), purchased within one week prior to the commencement of the academic year for public and private schools.

Board of Trustees Regulations -- University Of Rhode Island

([S 440](#), Sosnowski, Senate Finance)

([H 5747](#), Fogarty, House Finance)

These bills would enhance and further define the role of the board of trustees of the University of Rhode Island and would provide the board of trustees with tort claim protections similar to other state colleges and agencies. These bills would also provide a more efficient procurement process for the university.

Full Funding of Education Categoricals

([S 448](#), Murray, Senate Finance)

([H 5977](#), Casey, House Finance)

These bills would remove the language that requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to prorate funds available for distribution among school districts if the total approved costs of sought after reimbursement exceeds the amount of funding appropriated in any fiscal year. This act would also eliminate the funding of the categorical programs pursuant to the transition plan in § 16-7.2-7.

Pension Fund Re-Amortization

([S 449](#), Burke, Senate Finance)

([H 5764](#), Serpa, House Finance)

These bills require a re-amortization of the state pension fund for 2026.

Rule of 90

([S 450](#), Ciccone, Senate Finance)

([H 5198](#), Fellela, House Finance)

These bills would allow teachers, state and municipal employees to retire upon the earlier of reaching age sixty (60) with thirty (30) years of service or the employee's retirement eligibility date under present state statutes.

Universal School Breakfast and Lunch

(([S 452](#), Acosta, Senate Finance)

([H 5742](#), Cadwell, House Finance)

These bills would establish a statewide “healthy school meals for all” universal school breakfast and lunch program in Rhode Island public schools phased in over three (3) years. The program would begin with all elementary school students, then add all middle school students in year two (2), and then provide universal meals for all students by the 2027-2028 school year. These bills would also direct that in operating its school breakfast and lunch program, each public educational entity would seek to maximize access to federal funds for the cost of the school breakfast and lunch program by participating in one of several identified federal programs in order to obtain federal funds to offset the costs to districts of providing free breakfasts and lunches and minimize the costs to the state. The General Assembly would be required to make an appropriation by separate line items in the budget to provide breakfast and lunch at no charge for children in state subsidized early childhood education programs.

Service Credit - Teachers Retirement

([S 454](#), Tikoian, Senate Finance)

([H 5279](#), Donovan, House Finance)

These bills would amend the current law on teachers’ creditable service so that a teacher who takes unpaid parental or medical leave during the year would be given credit for a year of service for that school year if they served a minimum of one-hundred thirty-five school days.

Support And Access to Bilingual Education

([S 457](#), McKenney, Senate Finance)

([H 5982](#), Felix, House Finance)

These bills would appropriate three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to establish a dual language program within the department of elementary and secondary education. These bills would also provide for the implementation of the support and access to bilingual education (“SABE”) act for all local education agencies (“LEA”) recipients.

Discrimination in Schools - Hairstyles

([S 519](#), Mack, Senate Judiciary)

([H 5841](#), Stewart, House Education)

These bills would prohibit discrimination on the basis of race by expanding the definition of race to include traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles.

Nonprofit Financial Disclosure

([S 579](#), Burke, Senate Judiciary)

(H 5454, Serpa, House State Government & Elections)

These bills would require any nonprofit, as a condition for requesting state funds from the General Assembly, to submit and to post on their website, a detailed list of ten of their highest paid director, officer and employee salaries, and any forms of compensation provided to those individuals. It would require further the disclosure to include fundraising, endowments, trusts, memorial giving and/or any and all activities that fund the nonprofit.

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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