

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

May 19, 2025

Email Campaign Opportunities

To participate in the RIFTHP email campaign in support of the **Rule of 90** legislation, [click here](#).

The RIFTHP is a founding member of the **Revenue for Rhode Islanders** Coalition that is supporting the legislation to increase income taxes on earnings over \$625,000 per year. To use the Coalition site to put your name on a petition in support of the legislation, [click here](#).

The RIFTHP is a member of the **Freedom to Read** Coalition, supporting legislation to stop book bans and to protect library workers. To send an email in support of the Freedom to Read legislation, [click here](#)

The Graduate Labor Organization, AFT Local 6516, has initiated an email campaign in support of legislation to ensure that students who are also workers have collective bargaining rights under state law. To participate in their campaign to support **Student-Worker Rights**, [click here](#).

Charter School Network Approval Moratorium

On Wednesday, May 14, RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro provided verbal and [written testimony](#) in support of [S 389](#). The bill by Senator Melissa Murray would prevent approval of future charter school networks. A charter school network is a parallel school district where the charter would have both elementary and secondary schools.

In her testimony, Calabro emphasized the significant cost that is attached to creating parallel school districts throughout the state. She cited the drain on local school district resources that happens when parallel school districts are created. Her testimony also stressed how some of the network charter schools are run by out-of-state corporations or boards, and Rhode Island revenue is being sent out of state to support these entities.

Calabro further testified that charter school expansion for the past three decades has failed to generate education improvement. She wrote "Study after study, including Rhode Island, shows no consistent or significant academic advantage of charters over traditional

public schools when controlling demographic and economic variables.” The charter industry submitted testimony in opposition to the legislation. RIDE also opposed the bill, which was held for further study.

Providence Teacher Rights

On Wednesday, May 14, the Senate Education took testimony on three bills sponsored by Senator Zurier. His legislative package would diminish teacher rights in Providence. [S 745](#) would make it easier to fire tenured Providence teachers. [S 746](#) would remove Providence from state law requiring a step system for teacher compensation. [S 747](#) would eliminate seniority protections for Providence teachers in cases of layoffs and displacement. RIFTHP President Maribeth Calabro and RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified against all three bills. Providence Teacher Union leader Patrick Shelton also provided testimony against the bill.

Former Providence Superintendent Susan Lusi has teamed up with former Providence Teacher Union President Steve Smith to tout this legislative package that targets Providence teachers for reduced rights. The bill also had the support of the current school superintendent in Providence.

In her letter, Calabro wrote, “Providence teachers work in challenging environments. They are on the front lines of systemic inequities, generational poverty, language barriers, and trauma that walk through the doors with students every day. Rather than supporting these educators, these bills undermine their stability, silence their voices, and guts their protections.

- Ending seniority does nothing but expose experienced educators to arbitrary removal, undermining institutional knowledge and professional respect.
- Eliminating due process invites capricious decision-making, punishes advocacy, and instills fear rather than collaboration.
- Creating a separate salary structure sends a clear message: Providence teachers are worth less.

Central Falls Schools – Local Control

On Thursday, May 15, the House Finance Committee and the Senate Committee on Housing and Municipal Government heard testimony on legislation to return the Central Falls School District to local control. [S 1063](#) by Senator Acosta and [H 6255](#) by Representative Giraldo would change the existing Central Falls School Board of Trustees (appointed by the Board of Education) to local governance. Separately, the Central Falls City Council voted unanimously to change the Central Falls Charter to have a hybrid school board of 5 appointed members and 4 elected members.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the Central Falls charter change on Monday May 12 and supported the Giraldo and Acosta legislation on May 15. He

supported democratic elections as the best means of governing schools and urged local control so that the community would have a say in their public school system. Jessica Parkhurt, Central Falls Teachers Union Vice-President and CFTU member David Upegui testified in support of the legislation. Parisi, Parkhurst and Upegui were all appointed by Central Falls Mayor Maria Rivera to serve on a Community Advisory Board, which came up with the plan to return local control of Central Falls schools to a hybrid board. Mayor Rivera and other members of the community all testified in support of the legislation. The Central Falls Teachers Union submitted a [letter](#) in support of the legislation.



Jessica Parkhurt, Central Falls Teachers Union Vice-President and CFTU member David Upegui testified in support of the legislation.

Providence Schools – Local Control

While the return to local control in CF was being debated in two separate hearings on Thursday, the Senate Finance Committee took testimony related to the return of local control of Providence schools. [S 669](#) by Senator Bissaillon would immediately return local control of Providence schools from RIDE to the existing hybrid school board. RIFTHP lobbyist Jeremy Sencer testified in support of the bill. He noted that there is unanimity of opinion throughout the City of Providence and the education community that the RIDE takeover of Providence schools has failed and there is a need to end the state takeover as soon as practicable.

Sencer, who taught in Providence schools for two decades, served on the committee that developed a report on Providence schools known as the Johns Hopkins Report. That report was ordered by former Governor Raimondo and was paid for by the Partnership for Rhode Island, an organization of corporate CEOs.

The legislation to return governance of Providence schools to the local board was submitted on behalf of Providence Mayor Bret Smiley. RIDE testified against the bill as drafted.

Civics Education Funding

On Thursday, May 15, the House Finance heard testimony asking for state funding for civics education. [H 5981](#) by June Speakman would create a state education categorical fund dedicated to civics education and teacher professional development. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered brief testimony in support of the initiative. The funding initiative is supported by Secretary of State Gregg Amore and other civic education advocates. RIC AFT member Perri Leviss offered verbal and [written testimony](#) in support of the bill. She is an Associate Professor in the Political Science Department and a member of the RI Civic Learning Coalition.



RIC AFT member Perri Leviss

Education Funding Initiatives

The House Finance Committee often holds hearings on over a dozen bills per evening hearing, permitting testimony of three or so minutes whether one is testifying on one bill or ten bills. On May 15, the RIFTHP offered brief testimony on six bills in addition to testimony on the legislation to fund Civics Education and the bill to restore local control to Central Falls schools. Because of the time constraints, the testimony on some of the bills was abbreviated.

On May 15, the RIFTHP testified in support of two bills to support bilingual education. [H 5744](#) by Representative Morales would fund scholarship programs for undergraduates and existing teachers to obtain a certificate in world language or bilingual education. [H 5982](#) by Representative Felix would fund a bilingual education program at RIDE.

The RIFTHP also testified in support of [H 5398](#) by Representative Felix that would amend the education funding formula to provide additional resources to students who are multilingual learners. The RIFTHP supported [H 5532](#) by Representative Furtado that would create a funding stream to support student behavioral health. The union also supported [H 5282](#) by Representative Donovan that would increase state funding for high cost special needs students.

Finally, the RIFTHP testified in support of [H 5279](#) by Representative Donovan that would ensure that teachers who take an unpaid leave of absence would get a full year of pension service credit provided that they work at least 135 days of a school year.

School Indoor Air Quality

On Tuesday, May 13, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted [written testimony](#) in support of [S 977](#) by Senator DiPalma. The bill would create measurable indoor air quality standards in public schools and create a testing and monitoring system to ensure implementation of the standards. In his letter, Parisi noted that complaints about air quality are common in public schools, and that having measurable standards are essential to resolving unhealthy conditions in schools.

This Week

- On Tuesday, the House Finance Committee will hear testimony that would provide a 2.3% increase to organizations that provide services to those with developmental disabilities
- On Tuesday, the Senate Finance Committee will hear bills to fund student behavioral health programs and fully-fund all education categorical funding programs
- On Wednesday, the Senate Labor Committee will consider legislation to enact binding arbitration in municipal employee contract negotiations
- On Thursday, the House will vote on legislation to increase the page rate for court transcripts

Bill Introductions

Providence Schools - Local Control

([S 669](#), Bisailon, Senate Finance)

([H 5335](#), Slater, House Education)

These bills would nullify the Department of Elementary and Secondary education's recommendation that the turnaround plan for Providence public schools be continued.

State Employee Scope of Bargaining - Longevity

([S 743](#), Ciccone, Senate Labor & Gaming)

([H 5530](#), Corvese, House Finance)

These bills, beginning on July 1, 2025, would allow state union employees to negotiate longevity payments in their Collective Bargaining Agreements.

Providence Teacher Termination

([S 745](#), Zurier, Senate Education)

This bill would amend the teachers' tenure act for Providence Public School teachers and provide a process for the dismissal and demotion for teachers or other persons assigned full-time to the school.

Providence Teacher Compensation

([S 746](#), Zurier, Senate Education)

This bill would allow a different minimum salary schedule for Providence Public School teachers whereby such teachers would be entitled to certain bonus and/or increased compensation for taking on greater responsibilities.

Providence Teacher Layoffs and Displacement

([S 747](#), Zurier, Senate Education)

This bill would allow the Providence Public School district, by reason of a substantial decrease in pupil population within its school system, to suspend teachers in numbers necessitated by the decrease in pupil population and provide a process for any suspensions.

Teacher Tenure - Misconduct - Deadlines

([S 753](#), Valverde, Senate Labor & Gaming)

This bill would allow the dismissal of a teacher after the March 1 deadline if there is gross misconduct by a teacher upon a student. This bill would allow the notice to be given at any time and will not have any time constraints.

School Personal Electronic Device Policy

([S 771-A](#), Murray, House Education)

([H 5598](#), Casimiro, House Education)

These bills would require every public school district to have a policy regarding the use of personal electronic devices on school grounds and during school-sponsored activities to reduce distractions and maintain environments focused on learning. These bills would also enable school districts to make exceptions to the policy

Uniform School Start Date

([S 773](#), Acosta, Senate Education)

This bill would provide that the school year for all public schools, including traditional public and Public Charter Schools, Independent Charter Schools, and Mayoral Academies, would start on the same date of each calendar year.

Public Employee Pension Increase - \$2,000

([S 777](#), Ciccone, Senate Finance)

This bill would require effective July 1, 2026, that all present and former employees, active and retired members, and beneficiaries receiving any retirement, disability or death allowance or benefit of any kind, shall receive an annual benefit adjustment of two thousand dollars (\$2,000) each calendar year.

Higher Education Endowment Tax

([S 778](#), Mack, Senate Finance)

This bill would provide for a tax upon the endowment of a private institution of higher education equal to two percent (2%) upon each dollar or dollar value within the endowment in excess of one billion dollars (\$1,000,000,000). These funds would be used to hire, retain, and support behavioral health staff within the public schools of the municipality where the private institution is predominantly located.

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.

SUBSCRIBE



Register to receive the Smith Hill Report directly, [click here](#)