

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Senate Approves RIFTHP Priorities

Two RIFTHP priorities and three other bills supported by the RIFTHP were overwhelmingly approved by the Senate on Wednesday, June 4. All of the bills have been sent to the House of Representatives, which has already held hearings on the House version of the legislation.

- **RIDE Employee Bargaining Rights** [S 987](#) by Senator DiPalma confirms that RIDE employees have bargaining rights notwithstanding wording in the education law. The bill passed on a 32-1 vote, with Senator Morgan being the lone vote against the bill.
- **Student Worker Bargaining Rights** [S 124 A](#) by Senator Ciccone defines workers under the state labor law to include student workers such as research assistants and residential assistants. The bill also contains other improvements to our labor law to bolster enforcement. The bill passed 27-5, with Senator Raptakis and the four Senate Republicans (de la Cruz, Morgan, Paolino and Rogers) voting against the bill.
- **Scope of Bargaining – State Worker Longevity** [S 743](#) by Senator Ciccone would expand the scope of issues that can be bargained under the state employee bargaining law to include longevity pay. The Assembly froze longevity in 2011 and did not permit union contracts to address the issue. The bill passed 29-4, with all four Senate Republicans voting against the measure.
- **School Indoor Air Quality** [S 977](#) by Senator DiPalma would create standards for school indoor air quality and a system of assessing HVAC systems. The RIFTHP testified in support of this bill, which passed unanimously (35-0)
- **Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration** [S 1059](#) by Senator Thompson would create a system of binding arbitration on all issues, including financial issues, when the parties cannot reach agreement at the bargaining table. The Senate vote was 28-5, with Senator Zurier joining the four Senate Republicans voting against the bill.

In Concurrence

In Rhode Island, a bill must pass both chambers in identical form in order to be sent to the Governor for action. It is not good enough that the Senate passes the Senate version of a bill and the House passes the House version of a bill. Ultimately, a bill must pass both chambers in identical form. This is called passage in concurrence.

This week, the Senate passed our House version of the Court Reporter Page Rate bill in concurrence and the House passed our Senate version of the Court Reporter Page Rate bill in concurrence. On Thursday, June 5, the Senate transmitted the House bill to the Governor and the House transmitted the Senate bill to the Governor.

The Governor may approve the bill, veto the bill, or permit the bill to become law without a signature.

Extended Teacher Post Retirement Employment

On Tuesday, June 3, the Senate Finance Committee heard testimony on teacher post-retirement employment. [S 1048](#) by Senator Britto would extend the existing exemption of the 90-day post-retirement employment cap for one more year. Normally, retired teachers may work up to 90 days without having to suspend their pension benefit. For the last several years, the 90-day cap has been waived due to the shortage of substitute teachers. The RIFTHP supported the bill because the substitute teacher shortage negatively impacts teachers who are needed to cover classrooms or accept additional students, disrupting education. Some of our retirees appreciate working after retirement in order to offset reduced pension benefits. The Committee approved the bill, and the Senate will vote on it on Tuesday.

This Week

- On Tuesday the Senate will be voting on legislation to waive the 90-day post-retirement employment cap for teachers for an additional year
- On Tuesday the Senate will be voting on legislation to require charter school operators to be neutral in union organizing efforts
- On Tuesday the House Education Committee will be voting on school district personal electronic device policy
- On Tuesday or Wednesday, the House Finance Committee is expected to vote on the FY 2026 State Budget
- On Tuesday the House Labor Committee is voting on legislation memorializing bargaining rights for RIDE employees

Bills on The Move

The following bills have passed one chamber of the Assembly and have been transmitted to the other chamber for action.

Teacher Certification Fee Waiver

([S 21](#), Acosta, House Finance)

This bill would extend teacher certifications without fee or penalty for three (3) or five (5) years for teachers who hold certifications as of July 1, 2025. This bill would permit a teacher who has three (3) years of certified teaching experience to acquire an additional certification through examination or content coursework. This bill would also direct the Department of Elementary and Secondary education to revise its regulations pertaining to certification to create multiple pathways to obtain teacher and administrator certification.

Captive Audience Meetings

([S 126-A](#), LaMountain, House Labor)

This bill would protect the rights of employees in the workplace relating to free speech, assembly and religion, as well as attendance at employer-sponsored meetings regarding political or religious matters. Employees so aggrieved by discipline or discharge by the employer would have the right to bring a civil action against the employer seeking equitable relief and/or compensatory damages including attorneys' fees and costs.

Public Employee Bargaining Unit Lists

([S 127](#), Ciccone, Senate Labor & Gaming)

This bill would require the employers of unionized public-school teachers, municipal employees and state employees, to provide the union, at least once every one hundred twenty (120) days, a list of all their employees in their union, as well as their personal and demographic information, which shall be kept confidential by the employer and the employee organization.

Right To Adequate Education

([S 177](#), Acosta, House State Government & Elections)

This amendment to the Constitution of the State, if approved, would provide that it would be the paramount duty of the General Assembly, the Department of Education, and other government agencies to provide Rhode Island residents with equal opportunities to receive an education that is adequate, equitable and meaningful effective January 1, 2027.

The Freedom to Read Act

([S 238-A](#), McKenney, House State Government & Elections)

This bill would promote free expression and free access of information by prohibiting the censorship of library materials. This bill would require the creation of a model policy related to library material within a public library and school library.

Nonprofit Financial Disclosure

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

This bill would require any nonprofit that receives grants or other funding from the General Assembly in excess of fifty thousand (\$50,000) dollars to provide certain information relating to employee compensation of the previous year's five (5) highest compensated employees with reportable compensation of at least \$100,000 to the general assembly, as a condition for requesting state funds from the General Assembly.

School Personal Electronic Device Policy

([S771-A](#), Murray, House Education)

This bill 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. The bill would also enable school districts to make exceptions to the policy.

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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