
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Pension Advisory Working Group

The General Treasurer's Pension Advisory Working Group met on Wednesday, January 31 to get a report by the ERSRI actuary. At the prior meeting, the Working Group identified numerous specific proposals made by witnesses to improve pension benefits. In the two-hour hearing, cost estimates from these proposals were presented to the Working Group and the public. You can view the slide deck with the cost estimates [here](#).

The actuaries presented the total cost of each proposal over time as well as how much the proposal would cost both the state and the municipality for one year. The actuaries calculated costs for proposals affecting retirees, teachers, state employees, municipal workers in MERS, and police and fire units. For example, changing the calculation of a teacher, state or municipal employee planning to retire using a three-year average instead of a five-year average would increase the unfunded accrued actuarial liability by \$102 million and will cost \$12.2 million a year for 20 years. The cost would be shared by the state (\$8 million) and the municipalities (\$4.1million). The municipality pays for all the costs for municipal workers and 60% of the cost for teachers. The state pays for all the costs for state employees and 40% of the cost for teachers.

The next meeting of the Pension Advisory Working Group is February 21. At that meeting, we anticipate that they will adopt a report.

Captive Audience Meetings

On Thursday, February 1, the House Labor Committee heard testimony on [H 7106](#) by Representatives Craven and Shanley. The bill would ban captive audience meetings among other employer-sponsored meetings. Employers mandate "Captive audience meetings" to coerce workers not to support unions when workers are trying to organize and win a union election. The bill, modeled after legislation enacted in Connecticut, prohibits employers from mandating that employees attend meetings other than meetings related to work.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn submitted testimony in support of the bill. In his [letter](#), Flynn noted the need to enact laws to protect workers from requiring them to attend meetings about political or religious matters. The bill does not restrict employers from holding meetings but allows

employees to opt out without fear of reprisal. The AFL-CIO, NEARI, and SEIU also offered testimony in support of the bill. The Chamber of Commerce and other employer organizations opposed the bill. The ACLU offered amendments to preserve the captive audience participation while deleting other aspects of the bill it found to be overly broad. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

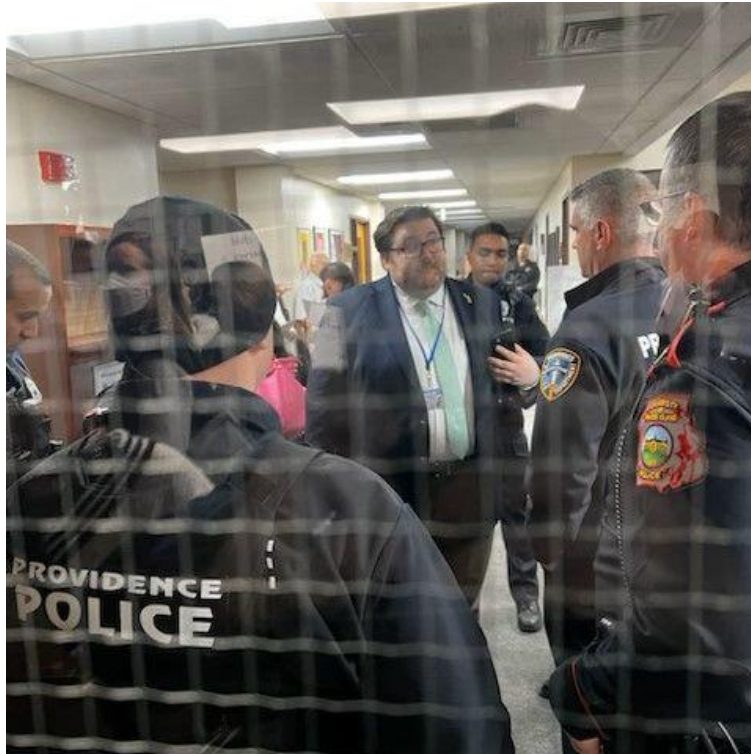
Seizure Safe Schools

The RIFTHP offered written testimony raising concerns about legislation sponsored by Representative Fogarty. Her bill, [H 7214](#), would require all school staff to be trained in seizure care in schools where a student with a seizure disorder attends. The bill has been submitted for several years and is supported by the Epilepsy Association.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted a [letter](#) raising concerns about school employees without medical training being permitted to administer anti-seizure medication. He also objected to an additional training requirement for school employees by the General Assembly. The Education Committee heard the bill on Wednesday January 31 and voted to hold the bill for further study.

Providence Teachers Union Picket K-12 Council





On Tuesday, January 30th, over 500 Providence Teachers Union members held an informational picket at the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education meeting. The purpose was to advocate for the rights of teachers to be included in the decision-making process. Over the course of the state takeover of Providence Public Schools, educators have been denied a seat at the table. As a result of this disempowerment, over 600 teachers have resigned, leaving buildings short-staffed and students without instruction. During a speaking program before the meeting began, members shared examples of how the administration has missed opportunities to meet student needs. Teachers and community members cheered as the speakers reminded the crowd that teachers are experts. Those testifying expanded on the theme that we will only build the system our students and families deserve through collaboration.

Once the K-12 Council meeting began, teachers planned to move into the meeting and silently listen to public comment. PTU organizers and members intended the silence to represent the removal of their voices by the Commissioner and the administration of the Providence Public Schools. Despite the fact that 50 people had signed up for public comment and 500 people were present, the meeting was held on the fifth floor of the Shepherd Building in a room with limited capacity. RIDE locked the doors and refused to allow entry to the meeting. PTU members remained outside the meeting and listened to the meeting on cell phones. Following the meeting, PTU President Maribeth Calabro stated, "Teachers know what students need because we are with students every day. We came to the meeting to shine a spotlight on the fact that our voices had been silenced. It was not lost on membership that the RIDE response was to further silence teachers."

Bill Introductions

Rhode Island Early Care And Education Workforce Data Act

([S 2142](#), Cano, Senate Education)

([H 7291](#), Shallcross Smith, House Education)

These bills would codify the previously funded Rhode Island early care and education workforce registry data system in the general laws, require that the data system meets national standards, and provide a deadline for implementation. It also directs the department of human services to produce annual reports on the status of both the registry data system and the early care and education workforce.

Elementary Student Suspension Limitation

([S 2143](#), Quezada, Senate Education)

This bill would expand and fine tune the law on the right to a safe school. It would authorize the school administration to issue an out-of-school suspension to students in grade six (6) or above not only if they are disruptive, but also if they are a threat to the safety of students, teachers, or administrators; or found guilty of violating school regulations involving alcohol, illegal drugs or controlled substances, or weapons. This bill would also provide that where students are in preschool through grade five (5), the school administration may issue an out-of-school suspension but only after a consultation with a school psychologist or other mental health professional.

Student Transition Plans

([S 2144](#), Quezada, Senate Education)

This bill would require transition planning for high school students with disabilities, who have a “504” plan, like the transition planning required for high school students with disabilities, who have an individualized education program (IEP).

Student Computer Device Privacy

([S 2145](#), Valverde, Senate Education)

([H 7046](#), Speakman, House Innovation, Internet & Technology)

These bills would prohibit an educational institution or school district from accessing any audio or video recording, transmitting or recording function on a student's institutional or personal device or using location data for tracking a student's institutional device or personal device, or allow a third party to do so, except in limited circumstances.

Athletic Trainer Availability

([S 2146](#), Lombardi, Senate Education)

This bill would require all school districts to designate an athletic trainer to be available for high school athletic practices and games.

Right To An Adequate Education

([S 2147](#), Picard, Senate Education)

([H 7396](#), Messier, 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, 2025.

K-2 Class Size Reduction

([S 2148](#), Gallo, Senate Education)

This bill would mandate that public-school classroom size be limited to twenty (20) students for kindergarten through grade two (2) on or before October 1 of each school year. Exceptions would be made for emergencies, for temporary situations not to exceed three (3) days and for mid-year enrollments when it would be impractical to assign the student to any class except for an existing class of maximum size.

Higher Education Post Retirement Employment - \$25,000

([S 2156](#), DiMario, Senate Finance)

([H 7029](#), McEntee, House Finance)

These bills would increase the maximum post-retirement employment earnings from eighteen thousand dollars (18,000) to twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) a year for certain retired educators.

Career And Technical Education Tuition Formula

([S 2160](#), Gallo, Senate Finance)

This bill would provide that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in consultation with a workgroup composed of various stakeholders, would develop a funding formula for school districts sending students to career and technical programs outside their district.

Special Education Categorical Funding Increase

([S 2162](#), Ujifusa, Senate Finance)

([H 7252](#), Donovan, House Finance)

These bills would amend the calculation of state funding provided to local education agencies for special education services. These bills would revise the calculation of extraordinary special education costs in fiscal years 2026 and 2027, and would also provide additional funds for excess costs for special education students who move into a district after a district has approved its fiscal 5 year budget.

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