

April 10, 2023

Education Budget Hearing

On Tuesday, April 4th, the House Finance Subcommittee on Education heard testimony on the Governor's proposed FY 2024 budget. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified at the hearing in support of some aspects of the education budget and urged changes on other provisions of the education budget.

Flynn testified that the RIFTHP supports efforts to include more funding for multi-language learners and special education students. The Governor proposed full-funding of these categorical aid programs. While the proposed increase is beneficial, Flynn urged the Finance Committee members to include MLL funding in the base education funding proposal so that there would be annual adjustments based on population changes and other factors. Flynn said that enhancing the funding formula would stop the need for advocates to go hat-in-hand every year to the Assembly for adjustments necessary to meet student need.

Flynn also commented on the Governor's plan to create a temporary funding hike for districts that suffer population decline due to charter expansion. Flynn asked that the plan be modified to extend the additional aid to help districts impacted by charter growth. He also noted that the state ought to create charter school enrollment caps in districts to prevent the de-funding of public-school systems in urban districts similar to caps in place in Massachusetts.

The RIFTHP also noted that overall education aid needs to be increased more than proposed. Flynn supported the Governor's suggestion that the Student Success Factor be increased to provide additional funding for students in poverty. Additional testimony was provided recommending that the Assembly create a state funding line item for teacher professional development to assist school districts in meeting legislative mandates. Flynn reminded the Finance Committee members that the state used to fund teacher professional development but had not done so for more than a decade.

Commissioners of Education – Advice and Consent

On Tuesday, April 4th, the RIFTHP provided written testimony in support of legislation to require that the Senate vote to confirm the appointment of future Commissioners of Education. The legislation, [S 378](#) by Senator Hanna Gallo, was heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill would require a Senate vote, known as Advice and Consent, for the hiring of the Post-secondary Commissioner, the Elementary and Secondary Commissioner of Education, and other Executive Branch positions.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi wrote a [letter](#) in support of the bill. He thanked the Senate for its previous support of the legislation, which unanimously passed the Senate last year. He noted that previous Commissioner searches have been opaque, and that we need more public input from stakeholders in the appointment process. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Public Entity Data Breach Procedures

The RIFTHP joined other public sector unions in support of legislation that provides for more worker protection when an employer data breach occurs. Legislation to enhance worker protection was heard in the House Innovation, Internet, and Technology Committee on April 4th. The bill, [H 5684](#) by Representative Cortvriend, would require expedited notification to affected employees and their unions. State worker data was stolen in a highly publicized 2021 incident by the Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority (RIPTA).

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi submitted a [letter](#) advocating for the legislation. He lauded the expedited notification to workers and the added notification to their unions to assist in making plans to protect financial and personal information after a data breach of an employer. He also supported required notification to the State Police of public employer cybersecurity incidents and the enhanced remediated services offered to employees when employer data systems are accessed by unauthorized individuals. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Bill Introductions

Taxation of Education Institutions and Hospitals

([H 5782](#), Biah, House Municipal Government)

([S 924](#), Ciccone, Senate Finance)

These bills would subject to taxation, real property owned by nonprofit institutions of higher education and nonprofit hospitals, but leased or occupied by for-profit persons and entities. These bills would also amend charters issued by the General Assembly to such nonprofit institutions and hospitals, and would take effect prospectively only, upon the date of passage.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten

([H 5790](#), Cotter, House Finance)

This bill would create public, high-quality pre-kindergarten education programs which are available to all children ages three (3) and four (4) throughout Rhode Island to increase children's school readiness. This bill would also require the Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Program to make funds available to offer no less than four thousand (4,000) high-quality pre-kindergarten seats for the school year 2024-2025. This bill would repeal the statutory laws pertaining to the initial pilot pre-kindergarten program.

Rhode Island Promise Scholarship - Public and Private Institutions

([H 5791](#), Giraldo, House Finance)

([S 274](#), Acosta, Senate Finance)

These bills would expand the Promise Scholarship Program to allow a student who is eligible to receive funds under the Rhode Island Promise Scholarship to use the same funds at most public or private institutions of Post-Secondary Education in Rhode Island.

School Construction Aid Incentive Extension

([H 5792](#), Cortvriend, House Finance)

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

These bills would amend the computation of school housing-aid for school housing projects and would provide that construction of certain projects commence in June 2024, rather than December 2023 in order to align such projects with the fiscal year.

Teacher Certification Fees, Alternatives

([H 5794](#), Giraldo, House Finance)

([S 488](#), Acosta, Senate Finance)

These bills would extend teacher certifications without fee or penalty for three (3) years for teachers who hold certifications as of July 1, 2023. In addition, during this period, fees for initial certification and for the Praxis examination would also be waived. These bills would permit a teacher who has three (3) years of certified teaching experience, to acquire an additional certification through examination or content coursework. These bills 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.

Education Savings Accounts Program

([H 5795](#), Rea, House Finance)

([S 525](#), de la Cruz, Senate Finance)

These bills would require the General Treasurer, upon a request to the Department of Education (RIDE) by a parent or guardian, to establish an education savings account to assist and support the parents, guardians and caretakers of students in any school district of the state with the tuition, materials, tutors, technology and other educational support for any student learning at home or at any other remote-learning site. The amounts contributed and interest earned would be exempt from the state income tax.

An Act Relating To State Affairs And Government -- Police Officers - Commission On Standards And Training

([H 5881](#), Noret, House Health & Human Services)

This bill would require police training on recognizing the possible existence of mental health disorders and substance use disorders and would require certified crisis intervention team training for all officers.

Seizure Safe Schools Act

([H 5856](#), Fogarty, House Education)

([S 763](#), DiPalma, Senate Education)

These bills would require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Health to adopt policies, rules and regulations for the administration of seizure rescue medications for children who have been medically identified as having epilepsy/seizure disorder.

Concussion Oversight Team

([H 5857](#), Baginski, House Education)

This bill would modernize and update the prior chapter on this subject by requiring the development of school district concussion guidelines, a brochure for the students and parents, the procedures for removal and return of a student from or to practice or competition and mandatory concussion training for coaches and game officials.

Low Performing School Vouchers

([H 5858](#), Chippendale, House Education)

([S 493](#), de la Cruz, Senate Education)

These bills would establish the Failing School Choice Act and would permit students at failing schools to enroll in any public school. These bills would also establish the Rhode Island Education Revitalization fund to provide funding to the school choice program.

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