
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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Session Begins Slowly

The 2021 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly will be held outside the Statehouse. The House of Representatives will meet in Veterans Memorial Auditorium and the Senate will meet in Sapinsley Hall on the Rhode Island College campus. The House and Senate normally meet three days per week. This week, the Senate met only on Tuesday and the House did not meet at all. Both the House and Senate will meet again on Tuesday, January 19, 2021.

While there have not been frequent meetings, there have been some bills introduced in each chamber. The House and Senate leadership asked members to work on getting bills introduced quickly, as the proposed deadline for bill introduction is in mid-February.

The House leadership announced additional leadership positions of Whip and Deputy Whip. Rep. Katherine Kazarian of East Providence is the new House Whip, viewed as the third most important position in the House leadership team. Representative Mia Ackerman of Cumberland was named Deputy Whip.

Budget Delayed

By statute, the Governor is supposed to submit a proposed State Budget by the third week of January. The Assembly finally enacted a state budget for FY 2021 in December, five months into a fiscal year which began on July 1, 2020. When they adopted the budget, the Assembly gave the Governor an extension until March 11th to submit a budget proposal for FY 2022. In past years, budget hearings have begun in late January, now they will not commence until the end of March. While no firm decisions have been made, Lieutenant Governor Daniel McKee may play a significant role in the FY22 budget plan to be submitted in March as Governor Raimondo awaits her confirmation hearing as the head of the US Commerce Department.

Charter School Expansion Moratorium Bill Filed

On January 12th, Senator Maryellen Goodwin introduced a bill that would create a three-year moratorium on opening any new charter schools or expanding existing charter schools for the next three years. The bill,

[S0013](#), is co-sponsored by Senate President Dominick Ruggerio, Majority Leader Michael McCaffrey, President Pro-Tem Hanna Gallo, and Education Committee Chair Sandra Cano. The bill would both prevent the K-12 Council from approving new charter schools and prevent funding for charter expansion not approved prior to July 1, 2020. This is necessary to prevent the six charter school expansions approved by the K-12 Council last December. The bill has been scheduled to be heard next Wednesday, January 20th at 4:00pm and will be streamed live on Capital TV.

The bill is the top RIFTHP legislative priority this session. Said RIFTHP President Frank Flynn “Our traditional public school are resource starved. We are facing an unprecedented budget shortfall projected to be over \$500 million dollars for FY22 and possibly beyond. We believe it is irresponsible to create or expand charter schools and further reduce support for local public-school districts forcing them to cut programs, services, and staff. This is a necessary pause to analyze and develop an equitable, sustainable school funding formula. This is particularly true for Providence and Central Falls which will have between thirty and forty percent of their students enrolled in charters. Funding parallel school systems within the same district is both unsustainable and irresponsible.”

Senate Committees Announced

During the January 12th session, the Rhode Island Senate announced committee assignments for the 2021 and 2022 sessions. A list of all committee assignments can be viewed [here](#). Most RIFTHP tracked legislation is heard in three Committees, the Education, Labor and Finance Committees. Those Committee assignments are as follows:

Education

Sandra Cano (D), Chair	Louis P. DiPalma (D)
Hanna M. Gallo (D), Vice Chair	Thomas J. Paolino (R)
Ana B. Quezada (D), Secretary	Ryan W. Pearson (D)
Jeanine Calkin (D)	James A. Seveney (D)

Labor

Frank A. Ciccone, III (D), Chair	Gayle L. Goldin (D)
Frank S. Lombardi (D), Vice Chair	Frank Lombardo, III (D)
John P. Burke (D), Secretary	Roger A. Picard (D)
Jessica de la Cruz (D)	V. Susan Sosnowski (D)

Finance

Ryan W. Pearson (D), Chair	Sandra Cano (D)
Louis P. DiPalma (D), 1st Vice Chair	Frank A Ciccone, III (D)
Walter S. Felag, Jr. (D), 2nd Vice Chair	Melissa A. Murray (D)
Thomas J. Paolino (R), Secretary	James A. Seveney (D)
Jonathon Acosta (D)	V. Susan Sosnowski (D)

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