

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

May 24, 2021

RIFTHP Supports Hope Scholarship Legislation

On Thursday May 20, 2021, the RIFTHP offered testimony in support of [H6217](#), a bill by Representative Gregg Amore to create a two year scholarship program for students at Rhode Island College.

The bill:

- Provide two years of state funding for tuition and mandatory fees after state and financial aid funding is taken into account.
- Students eligible for the program:
 - Must enroll in Rhode Island College in the fall of 2020 or later
 - Be a full-time students and have earned at least 60 credits
 - Maintain an average grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or greater
 - May not have received benefits at CCRI under the RI Promise program
 - Be on track to graduate in four years.
- Students must commit to live, work or continue their education in Rhode Island

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill because it offers opportunity for high school graduates by providing a significant financial incentive for graduates to continue their education and obtain a Bachelor's degree. The bill would provide more state support to lessen the debt burden on future RIC graduates.

Parisi also argued that the program encourages completing college on time because students earn the Hope Scholarship Act by earning two years worth of college credit in their first two years. He also argued that the bill supports Rhode Island College, an institution that has been underfunded by the State for years. RI ranks very low in state support for public higher education and this program would provide a policy-based strategy to increased state funding that supports student attainment of higher education degrees.

RIC AFT activists Mikaila Arthur and Vincent Bohlinger offered written testimony in support of the bill ([click here](#)). Rhode Island College President Frank Sanchez testified in support of the bill, as did Rhode Island Kids

Count. Outgoing University of Rhode Island President Robert Dooley spoke against the bill based on its impact on URI. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Opposition Offered to Tax Credit Scholarship Expansion

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn submitted written testimony in opposition to [H6034](#), a bill by Representative Chippendale that would increase the amount of tax money used to subsidize private and parochial school scholarships from \$1.5 million/year to \$5 million/year. The bill was heard in the House Finance Committee on Thursday May 20th. In his letter ([click here](#)), Flynn argued that the current legislation is unfair because no tax breaks are offered to donations to public schools. He also noted that when you couple the 90% state tax credit with federal tax deductions, that business are actually making money with the program.

RIFTHP Supports Student Well-Being Initiatives

The RIFTHP offered written testimony in support of legislation that would provide school lunches at no cost to students throughout the state. The bill, [H5931](#) by Representative Ranglin-Vassell, was heard in the House Finance Committee on May 20th. The bill mirrors legislation by Senator Goldin heard in the Senate several weeks ago. In his [letter](#) to the Committee, RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi noted that good nutrition will lead to better education outcomes. He provided the Committee an AFT Resolution from 2014 in support of student nutrition.

The RIFTHP also offered support of legislation that would increase state funding for student assistance programs by dedicating revenue from marijuana fines to support student assistance programs. The bill, [H5459](#) by Representative Cortvriend, was heard in the House Finance Committee on May 20th. In a letter to the Committee ([click here](#)), RIFTHP lobbyist offered support of the legislation while noting that state funding for drug prevention programs has been stagnant for over twenty years.

School Nurse Teacher Legislative Advocacy Launched

The RIFTHP is working with the Rhode Island Certified School Nurse Teacher Association to support legislation strengthening the requirement that school health programs be staffed by certified school nurse teachers. Recent regulatory changes allow school districts to hire RNs who are not certified in positions as long as they are not the teacher of record. The RIFTHP concern about the lessening of education requirements for those running school health programs was heightened when the Providence school district displaced two certified school nurse teachers in schools that were starting clinics in the school building.

Legislation to require school health programs to be staffed by certified school nurse teachers passed the Senate. An electronic campaign to encourage Rhode Island House of Representative members to vote for the legislation was recently launched. To view the advocacy campaign and send an email to support the bills, click here - actionnetwork.org/letters/supportsntcertification.

BILL INTRODUCTIONS

RI Promise Program - Reasonable Accommodations

([H5605](#) *Chippendale, House Education*)

This bill would provide that students with disabilities shall be eligible to participate in the state's promise scholarship program and provided with reasonable accommodations to access the opportunities.

Holocaust and Genocide Education Commission

([S0840A](#) *Goldin, Senate Education*)

([H5650A](#) *Kislak, House Education*)

These bills would create the Holocaust and Genocide Education Commission to:

1. Gather and disseminate Holocaust and genocide information;
2. Review current statewide Holocaust and genocide education programs and initiatives, and partner with the state department of elementary and secondary education to prepare a program;
3. Promote public awareness of issues relating to Holocaust and genocide education;
4. Advise and educate the Governor, General Assembly, and state departments and agencies regarding the nature, magnitude and priorities of Holocaust and genocide education, and develop policies and programs to address those needs; and
5. Seek opportunities to provide resources for schools to effectively teach about the Holocaust and genocide.

School Immunization Form - Opt-Out Disclosure

([H5706](#) *Phillips, House Health & Human Services*)

This bill would provide that school forms pertaining to vaccination requirements include information about religious and medical exemptions.

Essential Worker Hazard Pay

([S0610](#) *Calkin, Senate Labor*)

([H5721](#) *Morales, House Labor*)

These bills would require employers employing fifty (50) or more employees to pay "hazard pay" to employees involved in providing essential services during a declared public health emergency. The hazard pay would be at a rate of one and one-third (1⅓) times the regular rate of pay. Additionally, employers would

be prohibited from taking adverse employment action against an employee who refuses to work during a public health emergency.

School Renovations - Bottle Filling Stations

([S0459](#) *Cano, Senate Education*)

([H5738](#) *Kazarian, House State Government & Elections*)

These bills would require all new school buildings and those undergoing major renovations or substantial repair or replacement to plumbing systems to install water bottle filling stations.

Taxation of Private K-12 and Higher Education Tuition

([S0376](#) *Bell, Senate Finance*)

([H5808](#) *Morales, House Finance*)

These bills would authorize municipalities to tax net tuition income for all private institutions of K-12 or higher education. Financial aid would be exempt. No tax would be imposed on thirteen thousand dollars (\$13,000) annually for tuition for kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) and for twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) for postsecondary education and training. These acts would also require municipalities to include an explanation of the basis for tax exemption status for property located in the municipality. Any person or legal entity in the state would be authorized to challenge the exempt status.

Follow Us

The RIFTHP has a twitter account for legislative issues. If you are on twitter, follow us [@RIFTHPL](#).

**SIGN UP
NOW!**



register to receive the SHR directly, [click here](#).