
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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

June 4, 2021

Pension Eligibility Bill Heard

The Senate Finance Committee took testimony on [S0875](#), a bill by Senator Frank Ciccone. The bill would allow teachers, state workers and municipal employees to retire they are is at least 60 years of age and have at least thirty years of service. The bill was heard in the Senate Finance Committee on Thursday, June 3rd.

RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi testified in support of the bill. He informed the Committee that one of the most criticized aspects of the Raimondo-led 2011 pension reductions was extending the age of retirement for active employees. Requiring workers to remain until their normal Social Security retirement age is unfair, particularly considering how much money employees pay for their own pension benefits.

Parisi testified that a large portion of retirement benefits is now private retirement accounts similar to a 401k. Private sector employees covered by a 401k are eligible t start withdrawing their money at age 59 ½. Permitting teachers and other public employees to retire at age 60 is in line with private sector pension eligibility. Parisi urged the Committee to secure a pension impact note from the Retirement Board actuaries to get a firm estimate on the cost of the legislation. The Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

Charter School Admission Process Revisions Considered

On Wednesday, June 2nd, the Senate Education Committee took testimony on legislation related to the charter school enrollment process. The bill, ([S0827](#)) by Senator Cano, would define certain categories of “educationally disadvantaged students” including limited English proficient, special need and economically disadvantaged students. The bill further provides that all eligible students would be enrolled in the lottery that would be weighted for educationally disadvantaged students. This admissions process would replace the application process currently in effect.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn wrote a letter in support of the bill. In his letter ([click here](#)), Flynn communicated our belief that charter schools do not reflect the student demographics of sending school districts. He cited recent examples of schools that the Board of Education expanded that had half of the

special needs students compared to sending districts. Flynn urged that the Committee support the legislation to address disparities in charter school enrollment.

Also testifying in support of the bill was Jeremy Chiapetta of Blackstone Valley Prep, a mayoral academy charter school. The ACLU raised concerns about an opt-out process versus an admissions process. The Rhode Island Department of Education submitted a letter opposing the bill. The RI Association of School Committees supported the legislation. The bill was held for further study.

School Nurse Teacher Legislative Advocacy Continues

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. 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 bill, click here: actionnetwork.org/letters/supportsntcertification.

BILLS ON THE MOVE

The following bills have passed one chamber of the legislature and have now been referred to the other chamber for approval.

Physical Therapy in a School Setting

[S0235](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 6/1/2021 with a vote of 35 yeas, 0 nays, and 3 members not voting.

This bill would authorize a licensed physical therapist to perform physical therapy services to a student while in school without a prescription or referral, in accordance with the student's IEP or IFSP.

School Construction Funding - RI Architectural Firm

[S0283 Sub A](#), which was introduced by Senator Gallo, passed the Senate on 6/1/2021 with a vote of 36 yeas, 0 nays and 2 members not voting.

This bill would provide for school construction projects approved after July 1, 2021, that Rhode Island based architectural businesses be used or the project is only eligible to receive five (5) incentive points.

Advanced Placement Classes - College Credit - Public Higher Education

[H5522 Sub A](#), which was introduced by Representative Amore, passed the House on 6/1/2021 with a vote of 70 yeas, 0 nays, 4 members not voting, and 1 member recused.

This bill would establish a process for the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island to accept for college credit an advanced placement subject test score of three (3) ("qualified") or better in an advanced placement course. The University of Rhode Island's College of Engineering would be exempt from this process.

Parent Invitation - School Orientation

[H5698](#), which was introduced by Representative Giraldo, passed the House on 6/1/2021 with a vote of 71 yeas, 0 nays, and 4 members not voting.

This bill would require all public schools to send out written invitations to all parents, guardians or caretakers of students inviting those parents, guardians, or caretakers to an orientation at the school.tee for approval shall meet specified criteria as set forth in the statute.

Military-Connected Students – Residency

[H5823](#), which was introduced by Representative Vella Wilkinson, passed the House on 6/1/2021 with a vote of 71 yeas, 0 nays, and 4 members not voting.

This bill would provide that children of military personnel transferred to Rhode Island pursuant to military orders may register the children for school without physically appearing for the registration.

BILL INTRODUCTIONS

Former Spouse Divorced Retirement Benefits

([S0851](#) *Ruggerio, Senate Education*)

([H6311](#) *Fellela, House Finance*)

These bills would, for purposes of the teachers' survivor benefits program, amend the definition of "former spouse divorced" to include someone who was married to a deceased member for ten (10) or more years and the deceased member was required by court order to contribute support post-divorce. It would also include the "former spouse divorced" in the spouse and domestic partner's benefits statute.

Developmental Disabilities Ombudsperson

([S0876](#) DiMario, Senate Health & Human Services)

([H5846](#) Bennett, House Health & Human Services)

These bills would create a Developmental Disabilities Ombudsperson Program to be administratively attached to the Department of Administration. The Developmental Disabilities Ombudsperson would be selected by a committee, named by the Governor, and would advocate on behalf of adults with developmental disabilities and students with a developmental disability in transition to adult services.

School Reconstitution Time Limitation

([S0930](#) Goodwin, Senate Finance)

This bill would provide commencing in fiscal year 2022, that reconstitution and control of a school or district by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would not exceed two (2) years except for a possible six (6) month extension when substantial progress is achieved. Any reconstitution in effect at the time of passage would conclude no later than June 30, 2023.

School Committee Elections – Providence

([S0933](#) Goodwin, Senate Judiciary))

This bill would require that for cities and towns holding elections every four (4) years, the terms of the members of the school committee would expire on election day and the vote would be taken for the whole number of members on the same date, except for the city of Central Falls, restoring an elected School Committee in Providence.

School Field Trip Fundraising

([S0936](#) Gallo, Senate Education)

This bill would allow school committees to budget funds for field trips when creating a school budget.

RI Special Education Ombudsperson

([S0454](#) Murray, Senate Education)

([H5833](#) Carson, House Education)

These bills would establish the Rhode Island Ombudsman for Special Education, independent of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, to ensure school districts throughout the state meet the minimum standards required to comply with individualized education programs for students with disabilities. These acts would further direct that families be provided forms to evaluate their level of confidence and satisfaction with the schools in the process being followed in regard to their student, as well as informational pamphlets in regard to the services provided and contact information.

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](#).