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# *The* SMITH HILL REPORT



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

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## Voucher Bill Heard

On Tuesday, June 11, 2013, the House Finance Committee held a hearing on a school voucher bill introduced by Representatives Coderre and Corvese. There were many Catholic school children, their parents, and other proponents throughout the State House that afternoon in support of the voucher bill. The bill, [H6131](#), was modeled after legislation prepared by the corporate-funded group the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)

RIFTHP Field Representative James Parisi testified against the bill. He argued that there have been many cuts in public school programs and services, a situation that would be exacerbated by the state subsidizing tens of thousands of private and parochial school students. He informed the Committee that the expense would necessitate huge tax increases for Rhode Islanders.

The RIFTHP reminded the Committee that teachers are frustrated, morale is low, and that teachers do not support the current direction of education in our State. Parisi urged the Committee avoid pressure to subsidize private and parochial school education and instead work to improve public schools.

Others who testified or offered formal opposition to the bill include the School Committee's Association, the Superintendent's Association, AFSCME Council 94, NEA/RI and the ACLU. Proponents included representatives of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice based in Indianapolis, the Catholic School Parents Federation, and numerous private school parents and students. Also supporting the bill was the Tea Party and the Center for Freedom and Prosperity.



## EDITORIAL

# ***All leaders must stand tall for educational choice***

5/30/13 12:00 am

President and Mrs. Obama have made an educational choice for their children. They have chosen the tony Sidwell Friends School for their daughters Malia, and Sasha.

Sidwell is a private academy that educates many of the children of Washington, D.C.'s elite including Vice-President Biden's grandchildren and former first-daughter, Chelsea Clinton. Rhode Island's junior senator, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, and Governor Lincoln Chafee have also made the choice to enroll their children in elite, private schools. What do they all have in common? They all were able to make such a choice because they can well afford the high cost of tuition at these elite schools.

This isn't true for much of the nation or state of Rhode Island as the working poor and hard-working middle class families struggle to make ends meet in the sluggish economy. They're educational choice is non-existent and they must depend upon a public school system that is often underfunded and at times failing to provide adequate education for children. What the president, senator and governor also share is their disdain for educational choice for low-income families as they continue to oppose scholarship tax-credit programs and school vouchers. Thankfully, in the State of Rhode Island there is much support for these programs in both the state Senate and House of Representatives.

In the next weeks, as the General Assembly continues to negotiate the state's budget, there is an opportunity to increase the current Tuition Scholarship Tax-Credit program in order to allow more of Rhode Island's low-income, struggling families the support they need to access school choice for their children. This tremendous program over the years has allowed hundreds of children from economically disadvantaged families to attend the Catholic, parochial and private schools of their choice. We hope the leadership sees fit to do what Governor Chafee failed to do once again in proposing his budget and increase the \$1 million cap on the program and allow hundreds more families the educational choice that justice demands.