



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ^{AFT}_{AFL-CIO}

To: House Labor Committee
From: James Parisi, Field Representative
Date: April 2, 2025
Re: **Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration**
Testimony in **Support** of 2025-H 5135 (Rep. Bennett et. al)

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals supports Rep. Bennett legislation to amend the current municipal employee arbitration law to make matters involving the expenditure of money binding upon issuance of an arbitration award. Currently, the municipal employee binding arbitration statute provides that financial matters in an arbitration award are advisory and not binding on the parties. The RIFTHP represents four groups of school employees who bargain under the auspices of the Municipal Employee Arbitration statute. Those school districts are Woonsocket, North Providence, Cranston, and Coventry.

We support legislative changes to provide clear rules to conclude contract negotiations should the parties be unable to reach an agreement. Binding arbitration on all matters would encourage meaningful negotiations and lead to a contract. Should the parties not be able to reach an agreement, they would be subject to the uncertainty of an arbitration panel. We view binding arbitration as an incentive to get the parties to reach agreement before the arbitration process is invoked.

In 2019, the Assembly passed legislation to continue municipal employee contracts while the parties negotiate, mediate, or arbitrate a new contract. That law is being challenged in state court by a number of mayors. Should the mayors succeed in negating the 2019 contract continuation law, employees will lose protection of maintaining current pay and benefits once a contract expires. Enacting a municipal employee binding arbitration statute would protect the pay and benefits of municipal workers should the contract continuation law be overturned.

The RIFTHP would also support other statutory means of resolving contract disputes such as statutory recognition of a public employees' right to strike.

We urge you to **support H 5135**.

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