



RHODE ISLAND
FEDERATION OF TEACHERS AND
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AFT
AFL - CIO

To: House Labor Committee
From: Maribeth Calabro, President
Date: April 15, 2026
Re: **Binding Arbitration for Municipal Employees
Testimony in Support of H 7082 (Bennett, et al.)**

Chairperson and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the RI Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, we write in strong support of H-7082, which makes critical and long-overdue improvements to Rhode Island's municipal employees' arbitration statute.

At its core, this legislation reinforces a fundamental principle: when laws prohibit municipal employees from striking, the state has a responsibility to ensure that the alternative dispute resolution process is fair, effective, and meaningful. H-7082 advances that principle.

Municipal employees, including educators, paraprofessionals, and school support staff—dedicate their careers to serving our communities. They do so without the right to strike, a sacrifice rooted in the public interest. In exchange, the law has long provided binding arbitration as a substitute mechanism to resolve disputes. However, as currently structured, that system does not always produce timely, equitable outcomes or adequately reflect real labor market conditions.

By affirming the authority of arbitrators to render binding decisions on all negotiated matters—including those involving the expenditure of money, this bill restores balance to the process. Without this authority, arbitration risks becoming incomplete or ineffective, undermining its role as a true alternative to striking.

The bill introduces explicit factors for arbitrators to consider, including comparisons to similarly skilled workers in the local labor market and in comparable municipalities. These provisions promote consistency, transparency, and fairness, ensuring that municipal employees are treated equitably relative to their peers.

The bill maintains existing contract provisions during negotiations and dispute resolution, preventing disruptions that could negatively impact municipalities, schools and communities. This continuity benefits not only workers, but also students, families, and municipalities.

Ultimately, H-7082 is about fairness and functionality. It modernizes the arbitration process to reflect current economic realities and reinforces Rhode Island's longstanding commitment to collective bargaining rights.

When workers do not have the right to strike, the integrity of arbitration becomes paramount. This bill ensures that arbitration remains a credible, balanced, and just process—one that respects both employees and employers while prioritizing the public good.

For these reasons, AFT-RI urges the Committee to pass H-7082.

Thank you for your consideration.

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