

2015 -- S 1027

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LC002944
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2015

SENATE RESOLUTION

CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE COSTS,
BENEFITS, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A STATEWIDE TEACHER CONTRACT IN
RHODE ISLAND

Introduced By: Senators Paiva Weed, Gallo, Ruggerio, and Goodwin

Date Introduced: June 25, 2015

Referred To: Placed on the Senate Consent Calendar

1 WHEREAS, Public education is a priority for Rhode Island's families, communities,
2 educators, and lawmakers. Each year, supporters of K-12 schools passionately advocate for the
3 resources that are needed to ensure that every learner receives the instruction and opportunities
4 that will allow them to flourish; and

5 WHEREAS, Classroom teachers remain the most important school-based factor
6 contributing to students' academic success. Because of the central role that teachers play in
7 supporting student achievement, school districts in Rhode Island invest considerable time
8 developing and negotiating contracts that strive to put into place the conditions that promote
9 teacher excellence, satisfaction, and growth; and

10 WHEREAS, Under Rhode Island General Law, local school districts must engage in
11 teacher contract negotiations every three years, a process that involves the active participation of
12 superintendents, business officers, teacher representatives, and teacher union personnel, as well as
13 elected and appointed members of local school committees. The time that is spent on teacher
14 contracts means that these talented professionals have less time to devote to the important tasks of
15 overseeing district policy, operating schools, and attending to student learning; and

16 WHEREAS, Rhode Island statutes contain provisions that create challenges to the most
17 effective placement of teachers, including limiting the ease of movement from one district to
18 another, or sharing resources, where certain skills may be needed; and

19 WHEREAS, As the smallest state in the nation, Rhode Island may benefit from having

1 the state assume responsibility for negotiating a single statewide teacher contract, which allows
2 stakeholders in local school districts to focus more of their energy and efforts on student learning;
3 and

4 WHEREAS, In 2003, the General Assembly directed the Rhode Island Department of
5 Administration (DOA) to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of a statewide teacher contract. The
6 DOA's report, submitted to the General Assembly on May 12, 2004, provided estimates of the
7 impact of a single statewide teacher contract that varied too widely to be useful as a basis for
8 decision-making; and

9 WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Foundation has recently undertaken a comprehensive
10 study to gather information that will help to determine if students, teachers, school districts, and
11 taxpayers would benefit, instructionally and financially, from a single statewide teacher contract;
12 now, therefore be it

13 RESOLVED, That a special legislative commission be and the same is hereby created
14 consisting of eleven (11) members: two (2) of whom shall be members of the Rhode Island
15 Senate, not more than one from the same political party, to be appointed by the President of the
16 Senate; one of whom shall be the Director of the Department of Administration, or designee; one
17 of whom shall be the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, or designee; one of
18 whom shall be the Chair of the Board of Education's Council on Elementary and Secondary
19 Education, or designee; one of whom shall be the Chairperson of the Rhode Island School
20 Superintendents' Association, or designee; two (2) of whom shall be representatives of the
21 National Education Association Rhode Island, to be appointed by the President of the Senate; two
22 (2) of whom shall be representatives of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health
23 Professionals, to be appointed by the President of the Senate; and one of whom shall be the
24 Chairperson of the Rhode Island Association of School Committees, or designee.

25 The purpose of said commission shall be to make a comprehensive study and make
26 recommendations regarding the costs, benefits, and impact on taxpayers of a statewide teacher
27 contract in Rhode Island, which shall include salaries, benefits, incentives, and work conditions.
28 In studying these issues, the commission is encouraged to:

29 (1) Review the impact of current Rhode Island General Laws, including § 16-7-29 which
30 allows for up to twelve (12) annual teacher salary steps, and other laws that may deter the optimal
31 matching of teaching professionals and school districts;

32 (2) Utilize recent studies that will contribute to the focus and recommendations of the
33 commission;

34 (3) Examine trends, current policies, and available data pertaining to teacher salaries,

1 benefits, incentives, and work conditions in school districts in Rhode Island, regionally, and
2 nationwide;

3 (4) Identify the particular and total potential costs and benefits that would be incurred
4 with a single statewide teacher contract using different assumptions and models;

5 (5) Identify the components that would be most practicable to include in a statewide
6 teacher contract;

7 (6) Identify statutory and regulatory changes that would have to take place to allow a
8 statewide teacher contract; and

9 (7) Identify a transition process that would allow all school districts in Rhode Island to
10 migrate to a statewide contract within a six (6) year period.

11 Forthwith upon passage of this resolution, the members of the commission shall meet at
12 the call of the President of the Senate who shall designate the Chair and Vice Chair.

13 Vacancies in said commission shall be filled in the same manner as the original
14 appointment. A member of the public may be appointed in the place of a Senator. A simple
15 majority shall constitute a quorum.

16 The membership of said commission shall receive no compensation for their services.

17 All departments and agencies of the state shall furnish such advice and information,
18 documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or
19 desirable by the commission to facilitate the purposes of this resolution; and be it further

20 RESOLVED, That the commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the
21 President of the Senate on or before February 1, 2016, and said commission shall expire on
22 March 31, 2016.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
SENATE RESOLUTION
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BENEFITS, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A STATEWIDE TEACHER CONTRACT IN
RHODE ISLAND

- 1 This resolution would create an eleven (11) member special legislative commission
- 2 whose purpose it would be to study the costs, benefits, and implementation of a statewide teacher
- 3 contract in Rhode Island, and who would report back to the President of the Senate no later than
- 4 February 1, 2016, and whose life would expire on March 31, 2016.

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