

Press Release

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East Providence School Committee

Judge Mark Pfeiffer today issued a ruling refusing to order the East Providence School Committee to raise teachers' pay by 5% and roll back a 20% contribution to health insurance coverage.

The Judge ruled that he could not enjoin the School Committee because the Union's members have not suffered "irreparable harm" a prerequisite to getting an injunction.

School officials were gratified by the decision.

"We've followed the law to the letter," said Anthony Carcieri, Chair of the School Committee. "The Judge did the same. Now we can only hope the teachers will come back to the table and negotiate a contract that is fair to the school children and fair to the taxpayers and fair to the teachers. These are some of the best paid teachers in America. East Providence is not one of the richest cities. An adjustment had to be made."

The decision is the latest round in a contract negotiation that was marked by legal proceedings from the start. When the Union insisted it would not agree to negotiate unless the School Committee signed a pact to keep the negotiations secret, the School Committee filed an unfair labor practice charge, and then filed for arbitration of the contract. When the Union didn't name an arbitrator in the time required by law, the School Committee filed another unfair labor practice charge.

After a state-appointed mediator failed to broker an agreement by Halloween, the two sides tried an arbitration case all through November.

The Arbitrator's Award was only advisory on issues involving the expenditure of money. The Arbitrator recommended a 3-year contract, with a wage freeze in the first year and the teachers' first contribution to their health insurance.

"In another time, that would have been a great award," said Carcieri. "But if we accepted it, we would end this year with over \$8 million in debt. The law doesn't allow us to do that."

By law, school committees are prohibited from spending more money than they are allocated in any year.

"Last year, the former School Committee ran up some big debts. We owed \$5.4 million by the end of the year, so when that became clear, the Committee had to sue the City to be able to pay its bills. We can't let that happen again. The taxpayers can't afford it, and there's a state law and a Charter provision that won't allow it," Carcieri commented.

The East Providence City Charter limits property tax increases to 3.5% in any year. State law limits them to 5%.

Judge Pfeiffer ruled that the January 5 rollbacks on salary and health insurance did not cause irreparable harm to the teachers. "The changes do not affect the teachers' health care benefits – only the cost to the teachers," Judge Pfeiffer said in his decision.

"I think the Judge recognized that, at some point, the government has to step in to protect the public. We reached that point in East Providence. All our money is going to the teachers, while our buildings are crumbling and we can't provide basic supplies. The kids can't get the education they deserve," said Carcieri. "I believe most of our teachers want to change that as much as we do."