

2017 Rhode Island General Assembly Accomplishments

TAXPAYER/WORKER PROTECTION

- Legislators set into motion a complete [phase-out of the car tax](#) over 6 years, with annual reporting on the fiscal impact.
- Lawmakers approved a [90-cent minimum wage hike over two years](#), making 2019 the sixth year out of seven that the Assembly raised the minimum wage.
- The Assembly approved a new law requiring that companies of 18 or more employees provide [a minimal amount of paid sick time](#), and allow similar amounts of unpaid sick time without reprisal for employees at smaller firms.
- Lawmakers [prohibited employers from docking employees' pay](#) for things like breakage, cash register shortages or as a penalty for misconduct or missing work.
- Legislators created a [statutory vehicle for the creation and functioning of workers' cooperatives](#).

ELECTIONS/GOOD GOVERNMENT

- Lawmakers passed legislation that will allow citizens to [automatically register to vote when applying for a driver's license](#), its renewal or a personal identification document.
- The Assembly passed a law requiring the Board of Elections to [establish a post-election audit program](#) to make sure that the equipment and procedures used to count votes during an election are all working properly.
- The General Assembly passed legislation to [provide for the release of certain records pertaining to the investigation of 38 Studios](#).
- Lawmakers [created a 12-member commission to study enacting a line item veto](#), and runoff elections for the governor.
- Legislation to [increase transparency of I-195 Commission meetings](#) has become law. It will result in more meetings and discussions being held in public.
- The Assembly passed a law to [exclude weekends and state holidays from the calculation of the 48-hour public notice requirement](#), and require all public bodies to keep minutes of open meetings and file their minutes with the secretary of state.

PUBLIC SAFETY/ JUSTICE

- Lawmakers passed the [Protect Rhode Island Families Act to prohibit gun possession by domestic abusers](#) convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes and those subject to court-issued final protective orders.
- The legislature [outlawed the use of any non-hands-free personal wireless communication device while operating a motor vehicle](#), except for public safety personnel or in emergency situations. The new law goes into effect June 1, 2018.
- The General Assembly passed several bills to [overhaul Rhode Island's prison and parole system by applying the "Justice Reinvestment" approach](#) to relieve pressures from the correctional system while increasing public safety.

- Legislation to [help prevent human trafficking and apprehend its perpetrators](#) in Rhode Island and across the country was signed into law.
- Lawmakers [created a 19-member special legislative commission to study the effects of legalizing recreational marijuana](#) in Rhode Island.
- The General Assembly passed bills [placing a limit on the number of sex offenders that stay at any homeless shelter](#), [requiring reporting of those staying at homeless shelters](#) and [notifying parents of sex offenders living near school bus stops](#).
- The legislature [stiffened the penalties for assaulting a delivery person](#), making it a felony.

HEALTH

- The Assembly enacted numerous bills to [alleviate the opioid epidemic](#), particularly targeting deadly fentanyl, making electronic prescriptions the standard and ensuring doctors discuss addiction risks with patients before prescribing opioids.
- [Raises for state-subsidized home health care workers and those who serve the developmentally disabled](#) were included in the budget bill.
- Legislators passed a bill requiring [public places that hold 300 or more people to maintain an automated external defibrillator](#) on site.
- Lawmakers approved a measure [prohibiting carcinogenic chemicals used as flame retardants](#) from furniture, bedding and children's products.
- The General Assembly enacted a new law to [streamline the hospital merger approval process](#) as a means of keeping Memorial Hospital in Pawtucket open.
- Lawmakers required health insurers to cover [fertility preservation services for patients undergoing medical treatments](#) that could cause infertility.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The Assembly passed legislation to [facilitate economic growth in plant-based industries](#) and agriculture in Rhode Island.
- Lawmakers paved the way for Rhode Island [to become an early adopter of 5th generation mobile networks](#) (5G) – the next generation of wireless networks.
- The legislature passed a law to [speed up the regulatory process for developments](#), reducing the time it takes for developers to get certifications, decision-making and recordings of decisions.
- The Assembly made the Department of Environmental Management, rather than the Department of Health, [responsible for enforcing the provisions of the federal Food Safety Modernization Act](#), as it pertains to commercial growers, to help cut down on overbearing regulations for farmers.

EDUCATION

- The General Assembly, with passage of the FY 2018 state budget, [fully funded the seventh year of the 10-year phase-in of the state education funding formula](#), increasing education aid by \$46 million.

- Also within the FY 2018 budget, the legislature approved a [four-year pilot program to provide two years' free tuition at the Community College of Rhode Island](#), with requirements that students maintain a 2.5 GPA and stay in Rhode Island following graduation.
- Legislators passed a bill that requires the [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to consider incorporating substance abuse and suicide prevention education](#) into the health education curriculum.
- The Assembly passed legislation that requires the Department of Education to create a policy by Dec. 1 that would allow school districts, if they so choose, to submit detailed plans [to provide students with at-home lesson plans that can be used to replace a school day missed due to inclement weather or another emergency](#).

CHILD PROTECTION

- [Children under 2 are now required to be in rear-facing car seats](#) under a new law approved by the General Assembly.
- Lawmakers [banned the use of conversion therapy on minors](#) by licensed health-care providers. The discredited practice seeks to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- A new law approved by the Assembly [allows the Crime Victims Compensation Fund to be used to help child witnesses](#) of homicide or domestic abuse.
- Legislators approved a bill to require [hospitals to report to DCYF when a newborn has been exposed to substance abuse](#), has fetal alcohol disorder or experiences withdrawal symptoms.
- Legislators approved a measure [requiring childproof packaging for electronic cigarette liquid and banning e-cigarette use on school property](#).
- Two new laws approved by the Assembly will [require national criminal background checks and DCYF clearance for court-appointed special advocates for children](#) and [allow churches to require national criminal background checks](#) from employees or volunteers who work with children.
- Legislators approved a new law requiring a [brief course for parents of teens getting their graduated license](#).
- The General Assembly passed a law establishing [guidelines for Family Court in grandparents' visitation rights cases](#).

SENIOR CITIZENS

- The General Assembly [restored a program that provides no-fare Rhode Island Public Transit Authority \(RIPTA\) bus passes to low-income elderly and disabled people](#). The plan approved by lawmakers will fully fund the program for two years at the cost of \$5 million per year.
- Legislation was passed that would [allow anyone age 60 or older a three-day window in which to cancel any contract with a licensed contractor](#) if that contract originated from in-home solicitation.

VETERANS/MILITARY

- The legislature approved legislation that gives [veteran-owned small businesses a preference in the state purchasing process](#), akin to the benefit that is awarded women-owned and minority-owned businesses.
- Legislation that [expands the eligibility for a special license plate for Gold Star Families](#) to other family members was passed by the General Assembly.
- The General Assembly passed legislation that would [grant in-state tuition status at state operated schools to active duty and reserve members](#) stationed in Rhode Island.

ENVIRONMENT

- The Assembly passed a law [to increase local renewable energy generation in Rhode Island by expanding the state's remote net metering program](#) to allow participation by educational institutions, hospitals and nonprofit organizations, including churches.
- Lawmakers paved the way for state agencies to [create rules and regulations to formulate a statewide solar energy permit application](#).
- The Assembly passed a law that [creates an exemption to the land use change tax](#) for farmlands that establish renewable energy systems.
- The General Assembly passed legislation to [expand the successful Renewable Energy Growth Program](#) with an additional 400 megawatts of renewable energy over 10 years.
- Lawmakers passed legislation to [help encourage the development of more renewable energy generation projects in Rhode Island](#) by facilitating their connection to the energy grid.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

- Lawmakers approved legislation to [speed up the process of adoption](#) for any animals that are abandoned or impounded.
- The legislature passed legislation that would make it a violation to keep any [dog outside when the ambient temperature is beyond certain standards](#) for the weather safety scale if the dog is showing signs of poor health due to the weather conditions.
- The Assembly approved legislation to add [animal hoarding to the list of cruelty to animal offenses](#) and allow courts to consider whether the defendant's behavior might be the result of a mental disorder when sentencing.