

April 18, 2014

Legislative Press Bureau at 222-2457

THIS WEEK AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE – Here are the highlights from news and events that took place in the General Assembly this week. For more information on any of these items visit <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/News/>



- **House Judiciary Committee hears bill to legalize, regulate, tax marijuana**
The House Judiciary Committee held hearings on several bills relating to marijuana, including one ([2014-H 7506](#)) sponsored by Rep. Edith H. Ajello (D-Dist. 1, Providence) to remove the state's prohibition on adults using, possessing and cultivating marijuana for personal use, and subject the substance to state regulation. The bill proposes a wholesale excise tax of up to \$50 per ounce of flowers and \$10 per ounce of leaves applied at the point of transfer from the cultivation facility to a retail store, along with a 10-percent sales tax. Similar legislation ([2014-S 2379](#)) is sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence).
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- **Assembly OKs legislation resolving conflict in law that endangers federal funds**
The General Assembly approved and sent to the governor legislation ([2014-H 7964](#), [2014-S 2845](#)) designed to save a \$6 million federal grant awarded to the Quonset Development Corporation by the federal government, and similar grants that may be available in the future. The legislation will make state public works project apprenticeship requirements subject to federal law and regulations pertaining to federal aid contracts. Rep. Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown) and Sen. Roger A. Picard (D-Dist. 20, Woonsocket, Cumberland) sponsored the bills.
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- **Assembly OKs use of digital insurance cards as proof of financial responsibility**
The General Assembly passed legislation that would give motorists the freedom to travel without a paper insurance card as long as they have digital proof of insurance. The bills ([2014-S 2444](#), [2014-H 7098](#)) – sponsored by Sen. William J. Conley Jr. (D-Dist. 18,

More...

East Providence, Pawtucket) and Rep. Gregg Amore (D-Dist. 65, East Providence) – allow insurance customers to use their smartphones, tablets or other mobile electronics to display digital insurance cards as proof of financial responsibility in the case of a traffic stop or motor vehicle accident. Sen. David E. Bates (R-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence) and Rep. Brian P. Kennedy (D-Dist. 38, Hopkinton, Westerly) sponsor similar versions of the legislation ([2014-S 2055](#), [2014-H 7125A](#)).

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▪ **Senate passes enhanced sentences for gang-related crime**

The Senate passed legislation ([2014-S 2639](#)) sponsored by Sen. Paul V. Jabour (D-Dist. 5, Providence) to add an additional prison term of up to 10 years for any felony if it is committed in association with any criminal street gang. The sentence is to be served consecutively with whatever sentence the defendant receives for the crime itself, but would not be allowed to be suspended. Similar legislation ([2014-H 7457](#)) has been introduced in the House by Rep. Raymond A. Hull (D-Dist. 6, Providence, North Providence).

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▪ **Senate passes bill shifting forfeiture of assets from prostitutes to pimps**

Legislation ([2014-S 2820](#)) was passed by the Senate that will help law enforcement target pimps and others who pander or permit prostitution in the state. Introduced by Sen. Frank S. Lombardi (D-Dist. 26, Cranston) in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, the bill shifts the forfeiture of assets provision of law away from the prostitute and onto the pimp. A companion House bill ([2014-H 7620](#)) was introduced by Rep. Arthur J. Corvese (D-Dist. 55, North Providence). The bill also makes the forfeiture provision applicable to conspiracy to violate the Uniform Controlled Substances Act.

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▪ **Senate OKs ignition interlock bill to curb DUI fatalities**

The Senate passed legislation authorizing magistrates, in addition to judges, to prohibit drivers adjudicated of driving under the influence from operating a motor vehicle that is not equipped with an ignition interlock system. The bill ([2014-S 2231A](#)), sponsored by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) on behalf of Attorney General Peter Kilmartin, also establishes updated rules, regulations, fines and penalties for the continued enforcement of the ignition interlock system. Rep. J. Patrick O’Neill (D-Dist. 59, Pawtucket) sponsors the companion legislation ([2014-H 7308](#)) in the House.

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▪ **Erin’s Law namesake testifies before House, Senate committees**

Legislation to enact “Erin’s Law” was heard by the Senate Committee on Education and the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare. Erin Merryn, the bill’s namesake, testified before both committees. Merryn, of Illinois, was sexually abused as a young child and teen by a neighbor and relative. The legislation, already law in 12 states and now under consideration in 25 more, would create an age-appropriate course in Rhode Island schools in the prevention of child abduction, sexual exploitation and abuse. Sen. James E. Doyle II (D-Dist. 8, Pawtucket) sponsored the Senate bill ([2014-S 2058](#))

and Rep. Raymond H. Johnston Jr. (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket) introduced the House bill ([2014-H 7092](#)).

▪ **Senate Judiciary takes up firearm-related legislation**

The Senate Judiciary Committee convened to hear more than a dozen pieces of legislation related to firearms and gun safety. The list of bills included legislation ([2014-S 2774](#)) sponsored by Sen. Catherine Cool Rumsey (D-Dist. 34, Exeter, Charlestown, Hopkinton, Richmond, West Greenwich) requiring the District Court to provide information to the NICS database about those subject to civil commitment for mental health treatment and another bill ([2014-S 2390](#)), sponsored by Sen. Dawson T. Hodgson (R-Dist. 35, North Kingstown, East Greenwich, Narragansett, South Kingstown), to require that mandatory jail sentencing imposed on the crime of possession of a stolen firearm not be suspended or deferred.

▪ **Tomasso bills safeguard state's medical marijuana programs**

Rep. Lisa P. Tomasso (D-Dist. 29, Coventry, West Greenwich) has introduced two pieces of legislation to ensure Rhode Island is both highly successful and safe in regulating medical marijuana programs in the state. The first bill ([2014-H 7610](#)), which she introduced on behalf of Attorney General Peter Kilmartin, reduces the number of marijuana plants a cardholder can grow, increases the amount of usable marijuana a cardholder can possess, and requires a cardholder who cultivates marijuana to obtain a certificate of cultivation. The second bill ([2014-H 7611](#)) prohibits compassion centers from advertising medical marijuana sales in print, broadcast, or through in-person solicitation.

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▪ **Senate calls for study of new memorial at Vets' Cemetery**

The Senate approved legislation ([2014-S 2425A](#)) to create a joint commission with the House of Representatives to study the establishment of a Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial at the Veterans' Cemetery in Exeter. Sen. Walter S. Felag Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton) sponsored the Senate bill, and a companion House bill ([2014-H 7704](#)) was introduced by Rep. Marvin L. Abney (D-Dist. 73, Newport, Middletown). The Senate approved two other veterans-related bills, both sponsored by Senator Felag. One ([2014-S 2731](#)) will change the annual observation of Vietnam Veterans' Day from May 15 to March 29. The other ([2014-S 2423](#)) adds the R.I. National Guard adjutant general to the Veterans' Services Strategic Plan Advisory Committee. The House companion bill ([2014-H 7636](#)) was sponsored by Rep. Deborah A. Fellela (D-Dist. 43, Johnston).

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