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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/>



- **Resolution seeks portion of Google funds for drug treatment, re-entry programs**
Sen. Harold M. Metts (D-Dist. 6, Providence) has introduced a resolution ([2014-S 2872](#)) calling on the attorney general's office to commit a portion of the \$230 million in Google settlement funds to drug treatment programs and re-entry programs for ex-offenders. The settlement funds, which resulted from an investigation involving Google and the sale of goods by Canadian pharmacies to American consumers, are to be used for expenses related to law enforcement, although up to 15 percent can be distributed to support community-based programs.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Serpa bill could curb addiction, overdoses in Rhode Island**
With the number of drug overdose fatalities on the rise in Rhode Island, Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick) has submitted a bill ([2014-H 8042](#)) requiring health insurers to provide prescription coverage for certain listed drugs used to treat opioid substance abuse disorders. It would also require hospitals, hospital clinics, urgent care centers and emergency room diversion facilities to amend their discharge plans and transition processes to address patients with opioid and other substance abuse disorders. Sen. Paul V. Jabour (D-Dist. 5, Providence) has introduced similar legislation ([2014-S 2801](#)) in the Senate.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate Task Force on School Housing Aid releases final report**
The Senate Task Force on School Housing Aid, led by Sen. Ryan W. Pearson (D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln), has adopted its final report, which is a culmination of findings and recommendations on how the state should proceed after the school housing aid moratorium ends on June 30. The task force's recommendations offer a bold plan,

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including the creation of a quasi-public agency to manage the school housing aid program, a statewide facility assessment and shifting the major project reimbursement program from bonding grants to a pay-as-you-build model to avoid costly interest. The report suggests the quasi-public agency and new school construction programs be funded through 1 percentage point of the state's 7-percent sales tax, beginning in Fiscal Year 2016. The plan also outlines several additional funding options and suggestions for school districts regarding overcrowded buildings, facilities maintenance and alternative education resources.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **O'Grady proposal would encourage safer cleaning products in schools**

As a means to prevent suffering and lost school days among the many children with asthma, Rep. Jeremiah T. O'Grady (D-Dist. 46, Lincoln, Pawtucket) has proposed legislation ([2014-H 7827](#)) to set guidelines that encourage the use of healthier cleaning products in schools.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Valencia's inspector general bill targets corruption, fraud, waste**

Rep. Larry Valencia (D-Dist. 39, Richmond, Exeter, Hopkinton) urged the House Finance Committee to consider legislation ([2014-H 7121](#)) to establish the Office of the Inspector General as an independent way to promote good government and reduce waste, fraud, mismanagement and corruption. The bill gives the Office of Inspector General subpoena and investigative powers to allow for the prosecution of potential wrongdoers in real time, before the statute of limitations runs out. Senators Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-Dist. 33, Coventry, East Greenwich, West Greenwich) and Catherine Cool Rumsey (D-Dist. 34, Exeter, Charlestown, Hopkinton, Richmond, West Greenwich) sponsor similar bills ([2014-S 2068](#), [2014-S 2346](#)) in the Senate.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Ackerman testifies on behalf of bill accelerating state aid for education**

Rep. Mia A. Ackerman (D-Dist. 45, Cumberland, Lincoln) testified before the House Finance Committee on behalf of her legislation ([2014-H 7182](#)) to accelerate the transition plan for state aid to education. The act would specifically accelerate the amounts paid to local education agencies (LEAs) that receive more education aid than the LEA was receiving as of the effective date of the school funding formula, but keeps the 10-year transition in place for those districts receiving less education aid. Sen. Ryan W. Pearson (D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln) is the Senate sponsor of the bill.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Revenue and Caseload Estimating Conference announces hearing schedule**

The Revenue and Caseload Estimating Conference has announced its spring hearing schedule, which begins April 28 and concludes May 9. Twice yearly, in May and September, the conference principals (the state budget officer, the Senate fiscal adviser, and the House fiscal adviser) must reach a consensus on what the state general revenues and caseload expenses are estimated to be for the current fiscal year and the next year. The General Assembly and the budget office use those projections to prepare the budget.

[Click here to see hearing schedule.](#)

