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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/>



- **Bridge toll bill gives Assembly more time to vet transportation proposal**
Rep. John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Portsmouth, Tiverton) introduced legislation that would ultimately accommodate a full vetting process for an equitable alternative to Sakonnet River Bridge tolls. The legislation ([2014-H 7569](#)) extends the date that the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (RITBA) may impose a toll on the Sakonnet bridge – not to exceed 10 cents – from April 1, 2014 to July 1, 2014. Sen. Louis P. DiPalma (D-Dist. 12, Middletown, Newport, Little Compton, Tiverton) plans to submit identical legislation in the Senate.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Firearms task force recommends limited expansion of NICS reporting**
The 20-member Joint Behavioral Health and Firearms Safety Task Force, led by co-chairwomen Rep. Deborah Ruggiero (D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown) and Sen. Catherine Cool Rumsey (D-Dist. 34, Exeter, Charlestown, Hopkinton, Richmond, West Greenwich), accepted its report to the General Assembly detailing the many limitations the state faces in widening reporting of mental health or behavioral health records under health care privacy laws. The panel recommended Rhode Island begin submitting limited additional information about mental health actions to the national database used to screen gun buyers.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate passes Raptakis murder/parole legislation**
The Senate approved legislation that will require individuals convicted of first- or second-degree murder to serve at least 50 percent of a sentence before being eligible for parole. Sponsored by Sen. Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-Dist. 33, Coventry, East

More...

Greenwich, West Greenwich), the bill ([2014-S 2029](#)) will apply to those convicted of first- or second-degree murder who have not been sentenced to life. An identical House bill ([2014-H 7101](#)), sponsored by Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick), is before the House Committee on Judiciary.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Goodwin bill would remove GED roadblocks**

Sen. Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence) has introduced legislation ([2014-S 2182](#)) to address the recent price hike in the General Education Development (GED) high school equivalency test fee, which rose from \$55 to \$120. The bill requires the Department of Education to consider alternative, lower cost tests, such as those used in other states, and to adopt regulations for a waiver of fees. The bill was a recommendation of the Senate's "Rhode to Work" legislative action plan.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Bills expand, improve review process of state Office of Regulatory Reform**

Legislation was introduced in the Senate and House of Representatives to improve and expand the review process of the Office of Regulatory Reform (ORR) as it works to improve the state's business regulations and permitting procedures. One bill allows review of the nearly 20 percent of regulations that had been excluded when the ORR was created. The bills ([2014-S 2480](#), [2014-H 7520](#)) were sponsored by Sen. Erin P. Lynch (D-Dist. 32, Warwick, Cranston) and Rep. John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Portsmouth, Tiverton). The other legislation ([2014-S 2457](#), [2014-H 7703](#)) will synchronize the review timetables being undertaken by both the ORR and the Office of the Secretary of State. Those were introduced by Sen. Walter S. Felag Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton) and Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick).
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Senate Education hears presentation, legislation on adult education**

The Senate Committee on Education, chaired by Sen. Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick), heard from Dr. Phillip Less, administrator of the Adult Basic Education and GED programs, Office of Multiple Pathways of the Department of Education, who presented an overview of various adult basic, adult secondary and ESL programs. The committee also heard testimony on several bills relating to adult education which were recommendations of the "Rhode to Work" Senate initiative.

- **Almeida bill develops African-American history curriculum for public schools**

Rep. Joseph S. Almeida is proposing the creation of the 1696 Historical Commission to develop a special new curriculum for Rhode Island schools. Under the legislation ([2014-H 7490](#)), the 1696 Historical Commission would be organized to develop a comprehensive African-American history curriculum for Rhode Island public schools ranging from kindergarten through grade 12.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Office of Energy Resources offers presentation on renewable energy changes**

The Senate Committee on Environment and Agriculture, chaired by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham), viewed a presentation on

regional energy developments. Marion S. Gold, commissioner of the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER), spoke of recent changes – including those related to renewable energy – and their impacts on the state.

▪ **Assembly hears update on state's health**

Dr. Michael Fine, director of the Rhode Island Department of Health (DOH), addressed members of the General Assembly, providing an update on the state of the state's health. He also offered legislators additional opportunities to make Rhode Island the healthiest state in the nation. Dr. Fine has been director of DOH since July 2011.

▪ **General Assembly celebrates Black History Month with joint session program**

The state legislature held its fifth annual Joint Legislative Black History Month Heritage Celebration in the House Chamber at the State House. This year's program, "Recognizing Past Contributions and Current Successes," featured Marion Orr, director of the A. Alfred Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions at Brown University, as the keynote speaker. Among those paying tribute to Black History Month were members of the Rhode Island Legislative Black and Latino Caucus, House Speaker Gordon D. Fox and Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed.