

Jan. 10, 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/>



- **2014 legislative session begins**
The General Assembly began its 2014 session with Speaker Gordon D. Fox (D-Dist. 4, Providence) and Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) outlining their priorities for the year in separate addresses to their respective chambers.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Bill prohibits state from using pension funds for lawsuit legal fees**
Senate Majority Leader Dominick J. Ruggiero (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) has introduced legislation ([2014-S 2009](#)) to prohibit the use of retirement system funds to pay the state's legal costs in its defense of the unions' court challenge to the 2011 pension reforms, or similar cases that may arise.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Judiciary chairpersons introduce bill to encourage 38 Studios settlement**
The chairpersons of the House and Senate judiciary committees, Rep. Edith H. Ajello (D-Dist. 1, Providence) and Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick), introduced legislation ([2014-H 7050](#), [2014-S 2008](#)) requested by the administration to help facilitate a settlement of the state's lawsuit against those who pushed for state backing of \$75 million in loans for Curt Schilling's now-bankrupt video game company. The bill, which applies solely to the 38 Studios suit, provides some protections from future claims for the defendants should they settle in good faith.
- **Legislation calls for longer jail time for 1st-, 2nd-degree murder convictions**
Sen. Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-Dist. 33, Coventry, East Greenwich, West Greenwich)

More...

has introduced legislation ([2014-S 2029](#)) requiring individuals convicted of first- or second-degree murder who have not been sentenced to a life term to serve at least 50 percent of a sentence prior to being eligible for parole. Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick) intends to introduce the bill in the House.

- **Melo submits ban on sale of electronic cigarettes to minors**

With the backing of anti-smoking advocates, House Finance Committee Chairman Helio Melo (D-Dist. 64, East Providence) introduced legislation ([2014-H 7021](#)) to classify electronic cigarettes and similar products as tobacco products as a means to ban their sale to minors.

- **Senate Task Force on School Housing Aid holds inaugural meeting**

The Senate Task Force on School Housing Aid, chaired by Sen. Ryan W. Pearson (D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln), heard a presentation from the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) regarding the current school housing aid statute and program model during its first meeting. The task force is charged with reviewing the current school housing aid statute to determine its financial viability in the long term and set forth a plan to ensure that schools across Rhode Island are both modern and safe. The moratorium on school housing aid is scheduled to end June 30, 2014. President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed appointed members of the Senate panel in December.

- **Bill calls on state to share any surplus with cities, towns**

In anticipation of better economic days for the state, Rep. K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) has introduced legislation ([2014-H 7035](#)) requiring that 50 percent of any state budget surplus be distributed to cities and towns, and that municipalities use those funds only to pay for unfunded liabilities, bond debt or pension programs. [Click here to see news release.](#)

- **O'Neill introduces hit-and-run legislation**

Sen. Edward J. O'Neill (I-Dist. 17, Lincoln, North Providence) introduced a bill ([2014-S 2037](#)) that would create harsher penalties for leaving the scene of a motor vehicle accident. Those found guilty of leaving the scene would face longer jail sentences, huge fines and, in one case, permanent loss of their licenses with the enactment of this legislation.

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

- **House briefed on HealthSource RI**

Christine Ferguson, executive director of HealthSource RI, provided a briefing to state representatives on the state's new health insurance marketplace, which was created as part of the Affordable Care Act. Ferguson briefed state senators about the marketplace in October.

- **Legislation makes technical fixes in Commerce Corporation law**

Legislation has been introduced by Sen. James C. Sheehan (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown) and Rep. Stephen R. Ucci (D-Dist. 42, Johnston, Cranston) to correct minor technical changes in the law enacted last year re-branding the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation as the Commerce Corporation. The

amendments in the bills ([2014-S 2011](#), [2014-H 7059](#)) clarify that the EDC is changing its name to – but not being replaced by – the Commerce Corporation. The legislation also adds language which extends the name change to important documents, such as bylaws and regulations.

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

▪ **Vigil, film mark anniversary of War on Poverty**

Legislators marked the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty with two events at the State House. House and Senate members participated in a vigil in the rotunda, organized by the Rhode Island Interfaith Council, and later in the day viewed the film “Inequality for All,” a 2013 documentary that examines income inequality in the United States.