

June 13, 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 approves Fiscal Year 2015 state budget**

The House approved a revised \$8.7 billion budget bill that closes an unexpected \$67 million gap, fully funds education aid while averting tolls on the Sakonnet River Bridge and broad-based tax increases, establishes a steady source of transportation funding, promotes economic development and reduces the corporate and death taxes. The bill institutes combined reporting to close a loophole that allows multistate corporations to avert state taxes. It also includes bond questions for public transportation hubs, a new engineering school facility at the University of Rhode Island, as well as a public parking garage at the Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence and environmental initiatives and improvements at Roger Williams Park and Zoo.

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

- **Assembly puts constitutional convention question on ballot**

The General Assembly approved legislation sponsored by Sen. Paul W. Fogarty (D-Dist. 23, Glocester, Burrillville, North Smithfield) and Rep. Cale P. Keable (D-Dist. 47, Burrillville, Glocester) to ask voters in November's election whether they wish to call a convention to consider revisions to the state's constitution. If voters approve the question posed under the legislation ([2014-S 2538](#), [2014-H 8060](#)), the constitutional convention would study the document that serves as the state's guiding framework and come back with recommended changes. Any changes proposed by the convention would have to be approved by voters on another statewide ballot before they would become part of the constitution.

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

More...

- **New laws ban hallucinogenics, set penalties for synthetic drugs**
 Two bills passed by the Assembly to ban certain hallucinogenic drugs and set penalties for possession of synthetic drugs have been signed into law. One of the new laws ([2014-H 7191](#), [2014-S 2651](#)) was sponsored by Rep. Arthur J. Corvese (D-Dist. 55, North Providence) and Sen. Frank S. Lombardi (D-Dist. 26, Cranston) to outlaw possession, sale or manufacturing of the previously unregulated hallucinogenic drugs salvia divinorum and gypsum or jimson weed, sometimes sold in gas stations and convenience stores. The other ([2014-H 7599](#), [2014-S 2754](#)) was introduced by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston) and Sen. Stephen R. Archambault (D-Dist. 22, Smithfield, North Providence, Johnston) to make manufacturing, selling or possessing 1 ounce to 1 kilogram of a mixture or substance containing a detectable amount of synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones punishable by up to 50 years in prison and a fine of up to \$500,000. For larger amounts, the penalties can be up to life in prison and \$1 million in fines.
[Click here to see hallucinogenics news release.](#)
[Click here to see synthetic drugs news release.](#)
- **Assembly OKs bill engendering new efforts to curb addiction, overdose fatalities**
 The General Assembly passed legislation ([2014-H 8042A](#), [2014-S 2801Aaa](#)) aiming to make it easier for hundreds of people suffering from mental illness and addiction to receive the treatment they so desperately need. The bills, sponsored by Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick) and Sen. Paul V. Jabour (D-Dist. 5, Providence), require mandatory health insurance coverage for the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders under the same terms and conditions provided for other illnesses and diseases. They also require hospitals to amend their discharge plans and transition processes to better assist patients with opioid and other substance abuse disorders.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Assembly sends 2 regulatory reform bills to governor for signature into law**
 The General Assembly gave final passage to two pieces of legislation designed to improve and to better coordinate the state's regulatory reform efforts. Passed were bills ([2014-S 2480A](#), [2014-H 7520](#)) introduced by Sen. Erin P. Lynch (D-Dist. 31, Warwick, Cranston) and Rep. John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Tiverton, Portsmouth) amending the process for submission of economic impact statements and eliminate a number of exclusions in the existing statute. Also approved were bills ([2014-H 7703](#), [2014-S 2457](#)) sponsored by Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick) and Sen. Walter S. Felag Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Bristol, Tiverton, Warren) to synchronize the review processes now undertaken by the Office of Regulatory Reform and the Office of the Secretary of State.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate approves increase in minimum wage to \$9**
 The Senate passed legislation ([2014-S 2249A](#)) that will raise Rhode Island's minimum wage to \$9 per hour beginning on Jan. 1, 2015. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Erin P. Lynch (D-Dist. 31, Warwick, Cranston), provides a \$1 per hour increase over the state's current minimum wage of \$8, which went into effect at the beginning of this year. A House bill ([2014-H 7194](#)) introduced by Rep. David A. Bennett (D-Dist.

20, Warwick, Cranston) is expected to be amended to match the Senate bill and come to the House floor next week.

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

- **Senate approves Ethics Commission question for ballot**

The Senate approved legislation ([2014-S 2824Aaa](#)) to put a constitutional amendment question on the November ballot, establishing the makeup and powers of the Ethics Commission and specifically its authority over members of the General Assembly. Sponsored by Sen. James C. Sheehan (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown), the amendment attempts to clarify the much-debated “speech in debate” clause of the constitution that shields lawmakers from legal action based on their duties as legislators.

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

- **Senate approves legislative package to strengthen workforce**

The Senate approved several components of its “Rhode to Work” legislative action plan, which seeks to help Rhode Islanders gain the skills they need to enter the workforce. Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) sponsored a central component of the package ([2014-S 2997A](#)), which repositions and empowers the Governor’s Workforce Board to administer and coordinate all workforce development in the state. Also approved were bills to remove financial barriers to obtaining a high school equivalency ([2014-S 2182A](#)), sponsored by Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence), and to provide more effective schooling and training ([2014-S 2950](#)), sponsored by Sen. Roger A. Picard (D-Dist. 20, Woonsocket, Cumberland).

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

- **Senate OKs Climate Change Council to curb greenhouse gas emissions**

The Senate passed legislation ([2014-S 2952A](#)) sponsored by Sen. William J. Conley Jr. (D-Dist. 18, East Providence, Pawtucket) that repeals the Rhode Island Climate Change Commission and creates a nine-member Climate Change Council in its stead. The Rhode Island Climate Change Council would be charged with coordinating efforts to ensure the state is doing everything in its power to reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions while advancing the public’s understanding of changes in sea level, severe weather events and critical infrastructure vulnerability.

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