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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/>



- **Senate Health and Human Services Committee backs bills aimed at opioid crisis**
In light of the epidemic of fatal overdoses that has recently taken hold in the region, the Senate Health and Human Services Committee is considering a package of legislation concerning overdose and drug abuse prevention. Sponsored by HHS Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence), Sen. Walter S. Felag Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton) and Sen. Christopher Scott Ottiano (R-Dist 11, Portsmouth, Bristol), the package focuses on changing insurance rules so doctors can prescribe safer drugs and ensure coverage for addiction treatments ([2014-S 2534](#)), enhancing communications among subscribers and pharmacists to monitor prescription use ([2014-S 2524](#), [2014-S 2523](#)) and funding for drug education programs ([2014-S 2351](#)). The bills are sponsored in the House ([2014-H 7477](#), [2014-H 7574](#), [2014-H 7439](#), [2014-H 7145](#)) by Rep. Frank Ferri (D-Dist. 22, Warwick), Rep. William W. O'Brien (Dist. 54, North Providence), Rep. K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) and Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston), respectively.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Bill aims to innovate health care delivery through insurance exchange**
Sen. Gayle Goldin (D-Dist. 3, Providence) and Rep. Frank Ferri (D-Dist. 22, Warwick) have submitted legislation ([2014-S 2533](#), [2014-H 7819](#)) to revolutionize health care delivery in Rhode Island through the new health insurance exchange and a federal program that encourages innovative uses of it. The bill, which would create a new Rhode Island Health Care Authority to oversee the necessary policies and regulatory actions for the waiver, aims to create a health care system that is affordable, accessible, and delivers high-quality outcomes and health promotion.
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More...

- **Handy submits Resilient Rhode Island Act**

House Environment and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Arthur Handy (D-Dist. 18, Cranston) introduced the Resilient Rhode Island Act ([2014-H 7904](#)) to help the state begin planning to protect its people from the effects of climate change while stemming the state's contributions to it. It builds on Rhode Island's strengths and existing efforts to create long-term economic growth and resiliency across the state.

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- **Senate approves bills prepping for constitutional convention question**

The Senate approved bills ([2014-S 2538](#), [2014-S 2537](#)) sponsored by Sen. Paul W. Fogarty (D-Dist. 23, Glocester, Burrillville, North Smithfield) to establish a preparatory commission to hold hearings to discuss issues that might be addressed if the state were to hold a constitutional convention, and then put a question on the November statewide ballot asking voters whether they want to have one to consider changes to the state constitution. The bills will now go to the House.

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- **ACLU report: Truancy law produces lower suspension rates**

The Rhode Island chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) released a report, stating that nearly 1,700 fewer students were suspended during the 2012-2013 school year than in 2011-2012 due to a law passed in 2012. It marked the first time since at least 2004 that the overall number of students with suspensions dropped below 10,000. The law – sponsored by Rep. Grace Diaz (D-Dist. 11, Providence) and Sen. Juan M. Pichardo (D-Dist. 2, Providence) – prohibits schools from disciplining students with out-of-school suspensions for attendance infractions.

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- **Lawmakers call for major expansion of distributed generation program**

Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) and Rep. Deborah Ruggiero (D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown) introduced a bill ([2014-S 2690](#), [2014-H 7727](#)) that extends and expands the state's distributed generation program from its current 40 megawatts (MW) over four years to a total of 160 megawatts over five years. Presently, the pilot program – which the General Assembly approved in 2011 – allows small-scale energy producers to attach to the electric grid and sell their energy to National Grid, with a standard 15-year contract and a set price. The program was to expire this year.

[Click here to see Representative Ruggiero's news release.](#)

[Click here to see Senator Sosnowski's news release.](#)

- **Costantino pitches tax-free zone program with ties to higher education**

Rep. Gregory J. Costantino (D-Dist. 44, Lincoln, Johnston, Smithfield) introduced a bill ([2014-H 7913](#)) entitled "The START-UP Rhode Island Tax-Free Zone Program" to authorize the state to establish tax-free zones affiliated with both public and private universities, colleges and community colleges within the state. Businesses selected for access to such areas would be exempt from state income, business, corporate, local or franchise taxes and fees for a period of up to 10 years. Under certain restrictions, employees of businesses enrolled in the tax-free zone program would not have to pay state income tax on their earnings for that period.

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- **Gallo bill calls for full funding for full-day kindergarten**

Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick) has introduced legislation to provide full education funding for children enrolled in full-day kindergarten programs, beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. The bill requires that additional education aid that results from school districts transitioning from half-day to full-day kindergarten be funded at 100 percent and outside the proportional, transition funding plan enacted in 2012.

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- **Legislation proposes education benefits for disabled veterans**

Legislation introduced in the Senate ([2014-S 2396](#)) by Sen. Walter S. Felag Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton) and in the House ([2014-H 7389](#)) by Rep. Raymond E. Gallison Jr. (D-Dist. 69, Bristol, Portsmouth) would allow disabled veterans who are permanent residents of Rhode Island to obtain waivers for free admission to competitive programs at any public institution of higher learning in the state, provided they meet the academic criteria.

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- **House OKs bill to create state registry of music therapists**

The House approved legislation ([2014-H 7131](#)) to require all trained and accredited music therapists to register with the Department of Health to ensure Rhode Islanders can take full advantage of such treatments from reputable therapists. Sponsored by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston), the bill now goes to the Senate, where a companion bill ([2014-S 2357](#)) has been introduced by Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence).

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