

March 21, 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/>



- **General Assembly gives initial green light to extend 10-cent cap on Sakonnet toll**
The House and Senate chambers passed legislation ([2014-H 7569aa](#), [2014-S 2697A](#)) extending the date until which the Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (RITBA) must continue using a 10-cent cap on the Sakonnet River Bridge tolls. Sponsored by Rep. John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Portsmouth, Tiverton) and Sen. Louis P. DiPalma (D-Dist. 12, Middletown, Little Compton, Newport, Tiverton) respectively, the bills extend the bridge toll cap from April 1, 2014 to May 15, 2014. Each individual bill can only be transmitted to the governor's desk for a signature into law after receiving approval from both chambers, which could happen as early as Tuesday, March 25.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Panel urges behavioral health, primary care integration**
A panel composed of lawmakers and experts studying behavioral health and primary care has issued a [report](#) that says Rhode Island needs to adopt stronger policies and funding practices that encourage closer integration of behavioral health care, including substance abuse treatment and primary health care. Led by Co-chairmen Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) and Rep. David A. Bennett (D-Dist. 20, Warwick, Cranston), the panel also assembled a package of legislation to enact its recommendations.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Bill would put constitutional amendments on ethics before voters**
Legislation was introduced to ask Rhode Island voters to decide, by approving a constitutional amendment, the makeup and powers of the Ethics Commission and its

More...

authority over members of the General Assembly. The bill was sponsored by Sen. James C. Sheehan (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown) and co-sponsored by 22 senators.

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- **Bill proposes increased penalties for sex trafficking**
 Legislation ([2014-H 7916](#)) introduced by Rep. Doreen Costa (R-Dist. 31, North Kingstown, Exeter) would increase the penalties for sex trafficking of a minor and for obstruction or interference with enforcement of the state's sex trafficking laws.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Committee hears from advocates on all sides on firearms bills**
 The House Judiciary Committee held hearings on a dozen bills affecting firearms, some tightening regulations and others lifting restrictions. Scores of citizens testified on the bills, all of which were held for further study.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Behavioral Health and Firearms Safety Task Force's legislation introduced**
 Rep. Deborah Ruggiero (D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown) and Sen. Catherine Cool Rumsey (D-Dist. 34, Exeter, Charlestown, Hopkinton, Richmond, West Greenwich) have introduced legislation ([2014-H 7939](#), [2014-S 2774](#)) to allow Rhode Island to submit limited information to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) about people who are involuntarily committed in court for mental health treatment and pose a threat of violence to themselves or others. Rhode Island already submits relevant criminal records to NICS, and requires all gun purchasers to submit to a NICS check to ensure they are not disqualified from owning a gun. The two sponsors co-chaired the General Assembly's task force that studied the nexus of mental health laws and gun rights, which recommended the legislation.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Tanzi, advocates call for end to racial disparities in school suspensions**
 On the heels of an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) report that found Rhode Island's minority students are suspended at proportions far higher than their white peers, Rep. Teresa Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett), the Rhode Island affiliates of the ACLU and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Youth Pride and several other organizations called for schools to address the inequities. Representative Tanzi and Sen. Juan M. Pichardo (D-Dist. 2, Providence) have proposed legislation ([2014-H 7581](#), [2014-S 2430](#)) requiring the state Department of Education to study the problem and direct schools to develop plans to address it.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate Finance reviews combined reporting method for multi-state businesses**
 Officials from the Rhode Island Division of Taxation made a presentation to the Senate Finance Committee regarding a study of a potential combined reporting system for the state, which deals with data gathered from multi-state businesses. A provision enacted in 2011 as part of the Fiscal Year 2012 budget called for a study to see if combined reporting – a method of taxing multi-state companies which prevents them

from shifting their profits made in Rhode Island to states with lower corporate taxes – would benefit Rhode Island. Since then, businesses have submitted information as if the state were running a combined reporting system, though the way in which they have been taxed has not changed.

- **R.I. takes step toward digital 9-1-1 system, revolutionizing emergency response**

The Senate Committee on Commerce heard a bill ([2014-S 2576](#)), sponsored by Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick), that would direct the E-911 Uniform Emergency Telephone System Division to fund and conduct a study of the implications, costs and other considerations related to the implementation of Next Generation 911 (NG911) in Rhode Island. NG911 is an Internet Protocol-based (IP-based) emergency response system that would allow digital information to flow through the network in addition to distress calls. The legislation, which has been held for further study, would also authorize the division to contract with an independent third party to assist with the study and produce initial and final reports.

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

- **Senate OKs bill allowing police to give warnings to smokers in cars with children**

The Senate passed legislation ([2014-S 2084](#)), sponsored by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham), authorizing law enforcement officials to notify the offending driver of the dangers of exposing young children to secondhand smoke. The act does not allow a police officer to stop or search a motor vehicle based solely on the individual's decision to smoke with a child in the car.

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

- **Assembly hosts U.S. Senator Whitehouse for climate change forum**

U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, a national leader on climate issues, addressed members of the General Assembly on the environmental effects of global climate change. The briefing, "Responding to Climate Change with Leadership, Innovation and Economic Development," focused on federal initiatives to combat climate change and assist states in becoming resilient. The forum was arranged by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham), chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Agriculture, and Rep. Arthur Handy (D-Dist. 18, Cranston), chairman of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.