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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/>



- **House OKs legislation eliminating ‘master lever’**
The House of Representatives approved legislation ([2014-H 8072aa](#)) to eliminate the “master lever,” or straight-party voting option, on all future, non-primary Rhode Island election ballots, beginning this year. The bill, sponsored by Rep. K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick), also directs the Secretary of State’s office to launch a voter outreach program to inform voters of the impending change in the ballot.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **House Oversight Committee seeks testimony on loan guarantee program**
As part of its review of the state’s Job Creation Guaranty Program, the House Oversight Committee, led by Chairwoman Karen L. MacBeth (D-Dist. 52, Cumberland), has asked a number of key figures – including 38 Studios founder and former Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling – to testify about their involvement in the state’s decision to back \$75 million in loans to Schilling’s now-bankrupt video game development company.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Ruggiero introduces bill to stop property liens by casinos**
In response to news that Connecticut casinos have placed liens on Rhode Islanders’ homes to recover mostly small gambling debts, Rep. Deborah Ruggiero (D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown) introduced legislation ([2014-H 8129](#)) to ban the practice.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Bill hikes penalties for violations of wage laws**
The House of Representatives approved legislation ([2014-H 7624](#)) to increase penalties for companies violating the state’s wage laws, hiking not only the monetary

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finances but also the amount of potential prison time. The House bill was introduced by Rep. K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) and now goes to the Senate for consideration. A companion Senate bill ([2014-S 2673](#)) has been introduced by Sen. Frank S. Lombardi (D-Dist. 26, Cranston).

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

▪ **Metts introduces Community-Police Relationship Act**

To address continuing concerns about profiling by police during traffic stops and searches, Sen. Harold M. Metts (D-Dist. 6, Providence) has introduced legislation ([2014-S 2976](#)) to require police agencies to continue, for another four years, providing reports to the Office of Highway Safety concerning racial disparities in traffic stops and/or searches as well as annual reports indicating what action has been taken to address the issue.

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

▪ **Conley introduces bill to curb greenhouse gas emissions in phases**

Sen. William J. Conley Jr. (D-Dist. 18, East Providence, Pawtucket) submitted a bill ([2014-S 2952](#)) that repeals the Rhode Island Climate Change Commission and creates a climate change council in its stead, which would fall under the purview of the executive branch of government. Codifying Gov. Lincoln D. Chafee's executive order establishing the interagency Rhode Island Climate Change Council, this panel would be charged with coordinating efforts to ensure each of the state's department directors take climate change into consideration during decision-making processes.

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

▪ **Bill would rectify racial inequities in state-administered small business loans**

Rep. Joseph S. Almeida (D-Dist. 12, Providence) has introduced legislation ([2014-H 8007](#)) requiring the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation to lend federal small business funds in a way that better reflects the racial demographics of Rhode Island's population.

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

▪ **Senate OKs bill addressing taxation of for-profit hospitals**

The Senate passed legislation ([2014-S 2298A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Roger A. Picard (D-Dist. 20, Woonsocket, Cumberland) to articulate a community's right to tax for-profit hospitals, addressing a potential loophole for Woonsocket's Landmark Medical Center, which was converted last year by Prime Healthcare Services, Inc., into the state's first for-profit hospital. Rep. Cale P. Keable (D-Dist. 47, Burrillville, Gloucester) has introduced companion legislation ([2014-H 8085](#)) in the House.

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

▪ **House OKs Trillo call for commission to study streamlining business permitting**

The House unanimously passed legislation ([2014-H 8049](#)) to create a special House commission to study and provide recommendations on streamlining the permitting process for businesses in Rhode Island. Sponsored by Rep. Joseph A. Trillo (R-Dist. 24, Warwick), the resolution creates a nine-member panel that will report its findings and recommendations in January.

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

- **House forms commission to study school construction on former mines**
The House approved a resolution ([2014-H 7067A](#)) establishing the Special House Commission to Study and Provide Recommendations on the Need for Legislation Regarding Construction of Schools Near or Over Mine Sites. Rep. James N. McLaughlin (D-Dist. 57, Cumberland, Central Falls), primary sponsor of the bill, introduced the legislation in response to a controversial school construction project in the town of Cumberland, where a new charter elementary school is set to be built on the site of a 19th century mine shaft.
[Click here to see news release.](#)