

March 20, 2015

Legislative Press Bureau at (401) 528-1743

## **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/>



- **Rep. Lally announces resignation from House of Representatives**  
Rep. Donald J. Lally Jr. (D-Dist. 33, Narragansett, South Kingstown), a State Representative since 1989, announced his resignation from the House of Representatives. First elected in a special election in November 1989, Representative Lally's 25 years of service ranked second in the House this session in terms of seniority. He was serving this year as Speaker Pro Tempore of the House, having previously been the Deputy Speaker. His House tenure also includes four years as chairman of the House Committee on Judiciary. A special election to fill the House seat will be held on June 9.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **House OKs bill for hotel at Twin River Casino**  
The House of Representatives approved legislation to clear the way for construction of a hotel at or near the Twin River Casino in Lincoln. The bill ([2015-H 5798aa](#)), introduced by Rep. Jeremiah T. O'Grady (D-Dist. 46, Lincoln, Pawtucket), ensures that any hotel to be built at the casino is subject to the Town of Lincoln zoning ordinances. The bill now goes to the Senate for consideration, where a companion bill ([2015-S 0649](#)) has been introduced by Sen. Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence).  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Sosnowski bill banning hand-held cell phones for drivers passes Senate**  
The Senate approved a bill ([2015-S 0267](#)) sponsored by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham), that would outlaw the use of any non-hands-free personal wireless communication device while operating a motor vehicle,

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except for public safety personnel or in emergency situations. Those caught violating this provision would be subject to a fine of no more than \$100. That fine can be suspended for a first-time violator who provides proof of acquisition of a hands-free accessory subsequent to the violation and prior to the imposition of the fine. Similar legislation ([2015-H 5634](#)) in the House has been introduced by Rep. Teresa A. Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett).

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▪ **Rep. Regunberg, Sen. Goldin, coalition rally for tip wage bills**

A diverse array of organizations and individuals, united as One Fair Wage Rhode Island, joined legislators at a State House news conference to rally support for legislation to increase the state's tipped minimum wage, hiking it from the current \$2.89 per hour to \$4.50 per hour next January and then incrementally increasing the rate until, in 2020, it is comparable to the regular minimum wage at that time.

Addressing the news conference were the sponsors of the bills ([2015-H 5364](#), [2015-S 0291](#)), Rep. Aaron Regunberg (D-Dist. 4, Providence) and Sen. Gayle L. Goldin (D-Dist. 3, Providence).

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▪ **Rep. Serpa bill would protect nursing homes from financial abuse**

Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick) has submitted legislation ([2015-H 5712](#)) that seeks to curb financial losses nursing homes incur from patients who don't pay their bills by limiting abuses of the system. In addition to closing loopholes that allow misuse of the appeals process, the legislation would eliminate misuse of the Medicaid application process.

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▪ **Rep. Amore bill provides opt-out of PARCC testing**

Saying that many parents feel it takes too much time away from regular classroom work, Rep. Gregg Amore (D-Dist. 65, East Providence) has introduced legislation ([2015-H 5845](#)) to allow parents and guardians of students in Rhode Island schools to opt out of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for Colleges and Careers (PARCC) assessments and tests. Students opting out would be assured their academic records would not be adversely affected for not participating. Similar legislation ([2015-S 0736](#)) has been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Adam J. Satchell (D-Dist. 9, West Warwick).

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▪ **Kennedy, Algieri, AG bills protect against 'patent trolls'**

Legislation ([2015-H 5455](#), [2015-S 0596](#)) introduced by Rep. Brian Patrick Kennedy (D-Dist. 38, Hopkinton, Westerly) and Senate Minority Leader Dennis L. Algieri (R-Dist. 38, Westerly, Charlestown, South Kingstown) at the request of the Office of the Attorney General, would prohibit bad faith assertions of patent infringement against Rhode Island businesses and individuals. "Patent trolls" are individuals or companies that acquire patents solely for the purpose of using them to extract license fees and settlements.

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- **Senate bill makes military status bias an unlawful housing practice**  
The Senate approved legislation ([2015-S 0241A](#)) to add military status discrimination as an unlawful housing practice, protecting veterans who have an honorable discharge or an honorable or general administration discharge or who are members of the Armed Forces or Rhode Island National Guard. Sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Walter S. Felag Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton), the companion House bill ([2015-H 5593](#)) was introduced by Rep. Jan P. Malik (D-Dist. 67, Barrington, Warren).  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
  
- **Senate and House celebrate St. Patrick's Day and St. Joseph's Day**  
Both chambers of the General Assembly celebrated Irish and Italian heritage as they observed St. Patrick's Day and St. Joseph's Day. In the Senate, Gov. Gina M. Raimondo and Rhode Island State Police Superintendent Col. Stephen G. O'Donnell made presentations. Co-hosts of the celebration were Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) and Senate Minority Leader Dennis L. Algiere (R-Dist. 38, Westerly, Charlestown, South Kingstown). In the House, Johnston Mayor Joseph M. Polisena and comedian and writer Frank O'Donnell offered remarks on Italian and Irish heritage respectively. Rep. Gregg Amore (D-Dist. 65, East Providence) offered an Italian toast, and Rep. Daniel P. McKiernan (D-Dist. 7, Providence) did the honors for the Irish.  
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- **House, Senate committees hear presentation on hepatitis C**  
An informational presentation on hepatitis C virus in Rhode Island took place at a joint hearing of the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare and the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services. Making the presentation were Dr. Amy Nunn, assistant professor of public health and medicine at Brown University and executive director of the Rhode Island Public Health Institute; Dr. Alan Epstein, director of clinical gastroenterology at Roger Williams Medical Center, and Dr. Lynn Taylor, assistant professor of medicine at Brown University and director of Rhode Island Defeats Hep C. The speakers discussed the virus, including the disease burden, new treatments and potential for treatment expansion in the state.  
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