

May 15, 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/>.



- **Legislative leaders eye revenue surplus for economic initiatives**

With a new forecast of a \$173 million state surplus over the next two years, legislative leaders indicated they would like to use the funds for economic initiatives. House Speaker Nicholas A. Mattiello (D-Dist. 15, Cranston) said he would like to eliminate the proposed tax on second homes and expand the proposed eradication of the state tax on Social Security benefits to more middle-class recipients. President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) said the state needs to look at the minimum corporate tax, local property tax relief through the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program, Medicaid reform and investments in education and infrastructure.

[Click here to see President of the Senate Paiva Weed's statement.](#)

[Click here to see House Speaker Mattiello's statement.](#)

- **Rep. Serpa murder/parole legislation passes House**

The House approved legislation ([2015-H 5158A](#)) introduced by Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick) that would require individuals convicted of first- or second-degree murder who have not been sentenced to a life term to serve at least 50 percent of a sentence prior to being eligible for parole. The bill mirrors legislation ([2015-S 0132A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-Dist. 33, Coventry, East Greenwich, West Greenwich) that passed the Senate in April. [Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Sen. Sosnowski bill expanding statewide permitting system passes Senate**

The Senate passed a bill sponsored by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) that would promote expansion of the statewide

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electronic permitting system. The legislation ([2015-S-0397](#)) also requires each city and town to designate a liaison to the Office of Regulatory Reform with a responsibility of coordinating regulatory and permitting matters.

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

▪ **Rep. Blazejewski elected deputy majority whip**

Rep. Christopher R. Blazejewski (D-Dist. 2, Providence) was unanimously elected deputy majority whip by his Democratic colleagues in the House. First elected to the House in 2010, he serves on the Judiciary and Rules Committees and is an attorney with undergraduate and law degrees from Harvard University.

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

▪ **Senate OKs program seeking executive volunteers to improve state government**

The Senate approved legislation ([2015-S 0606](#)) sponsored by Sen. Roger A. Picard (D-Dist. 20, Woonsocket, Cumberland) to seek the assistance of experienced private-sector executives to help make state government more efficient. The legislation would create the Governmental Responsiveness, Expediency and Efficiency Team (GREET) program, which would place volunteer private-sector executives within state agencies to streamline operations, eliminate waste and make them more user-friendly.

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

▪ **Senate approves bill to name state insect**

The Senate approved legislation to make the endangered American burying beetle, found only on Block Island and in five states west of the Mississippi River, Rhode Island's official state insect. The bill ([2015-S 0448](#)) was introduced by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) at the request of third graders at St. Michael's School in Newport, who began their quest upon learning that Rhode Island is one of only four states without a state insect. It will now advance to the House, where Rep. Lauren Carson (D-Dist. 75, Newport) is sponsoring a companion bill ([2015-H 6093](#)).

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

▪ **Panel studying charter school funding issues report**

A legislative commission studying Rhode Island's education aid formula and its method for funding charter schools, led by Rep. Jeremiah T. O'Grady (D-Dist. 46, Lincoln, Pawtucket), issued a report finding that certain high-cost expenditure burdens are disproportionately borne by public sending districts and that charter schools, through the formula's tuition calculation, received increases in their respective tuition payments as a result.

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

▪ **Senate OKs bill to shorten disaffiliation period**

The Senate passed legislation to shorten the political party disaffiliation period for voters from the current 90 days prior to a primary election to 29 days. Rhode Island is one of about two dozen states that require a voter to be registered with a particular party to cast a ballot in that party's primary, but many of those states have a disaffiliation period of 30 days or fewer. The Senate bill ([2015-S 0256](#)), which now goes to the House for consideration, is sponsored by Sen. Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-

Dist. 33, Coventry, East Greenwich, West Greenwich).

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

▪ **Advocates, survivors support bill to keep guns from domestic abusers**

Rep. Teresa Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett) and Sen. Cynthia A. Coyne (D-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence) were joined by the Rhode Island chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America for a State House event in support of their legislation ([2015-S 0503](#), [2015-H 5655](#)) to prohibit gun possession by those subject to domestic violence protective orders and to allow courts to ban domestic abusers from having guns.

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

▪ **Women's Fund of R.I. honors Senate President Paiva Weed**

The Women's Fund of Rhode Island has selected President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) as the recipient of the 2015 Susan L. Farmer Award in honor of her pioneering roles in government leadership and her support for Rhode Island's groundbreaking Temporary Caregiver Insurance program, enacted in 2013. The award honors Farmer's distinction of having been the first woman to hold statewide office when she was elected Secretary of State in 1982, as well as her legacy of advocacy to advance women in government and public policy. In 2009, the Senate elected Senator Paiva Weed as the first woman in Rhode Island history to hold the position of Senate president. She was previously the first female Senate majority leader for five years.

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