

May 22 , 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/>



- **Senate OKs Good Samaritan law expansion**

The Senate approved legislation ([2015-S 0576A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) to broaden Rhode Island's Good Samaritan Overdose Protection Act, which protects people who seek assistance to save the life of someone overdosing on a drug. The bill would expand the law to provide immunity from prosecution for delivery or sale of illegal substances, not just possession, and would also expand the immunity to cover parole and probation violations, not just arrests on new charges. Rep. Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown) is sponsoring similar legislation ([2015-H 5416](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Senate OKs bill for performance-based funding for public colleges**

The Senate approved legislation ([2015-S 0603A](#)) to establish a performance-based funding component to state aid for Rhode Island's institutions of higher learning, linking funding to achievement of certain goals, such as improved on-time graduation rates and increasing the number of students completing programs in high-demand fields. The Performance Funding Act of 2015, introduced by President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed, now goes to the House, where a companion bill ([2015-H 5792](#)) has been introduced by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston).
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- **Senate passes Sosnowski legislation creating renewable energy task force**

The Senate passed legislation ([2015 S-0410](#)) introduced by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) that would require the Office of

More...

Energy Resources to assemble a task force to promote the development of markets for alternative renewable home heating and transportation fuel, such as clean burning biodiesel fuels. The measure now heads to the House of Representatives.

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▪ **House passes Fellela bill to make computer threats against schools a felony**

The House of Representatives passed a bill ([2015-H 5068A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Deborah Fellela (D-Dist. 43, Johnston) that would make it a felony to use a computer phone, smartphone, tablet, fax machine, social media or any like device to make threats against students at school. The measure now heads to the Senate.

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▪ **Senate OKs O'Neill bill that stiffens penalties for hit-and-run drivers**

The Senate approved legislation ([2015-S 0055](#)) introduced by Sen. Edward J. O'Neill (I-Dist. 17, Lincoln, North Providence, North Smithfield) that would create harsher penalties for leaving the scene of a motor vehicle accident. The measure now heads to the House of Representatives, where similar legislation ([2015-H 5028](#)) has been introduced by Rep. John J. Lombardi (D-Dist. 8, Providence).

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▪ **Senate OKs bill creating Joint Committee of the Repealer**

The Senate passed legislation ([2015-S 0624](#)) sponsored by Sen. Erin P. Lynch (D-Dist. 31, Warwick, Cranston) to establish a new General Assembly Joint Committee of the Repealer, to be tasked with the job of combing through Rhode Island's laws and proposing the repeal of outdated, archaic laws and those that are not considered business-friendly. A companion House bill ([2015-H 5054](#)) has been introduced by Rep. John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Tiverton, Portsmouth).

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▪ **Senate approves bill to incentivize non-traditional apprenticeships**

The Senate passed legislation to move apprenticeship training beyond typical building trades and into more non-traditional sectors of the workforce, such as information technology, design and management. Sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, Providence, North Providence), the bill ([2015-S 0065](#)) directs the Governor's Workforce Board to establish a wage incentive for non-trade apprenticeships, allowing a yearly reimbursement for a participating business apprentice of up to \$1,000. A companion House bill ([2015-H 5229](#)) was introduced by Rep. Christopher R. Blazejewski (D-Dist. 2, Providence.)

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▪ **Dr. Robert Ballard testifies for bill to fund URI Oceanography programs**

Dr. Robert Ballard, noted professor of oceanography at URI, addressed the House of Representatives and met with House and Senate leaders during a visit to the State House arranged by Rep. Eileen S. Naughton (D-Dist. 21, Warwick). He also testified before the House Committee on Finance on legislation sponsored by Representative Naughton ([2015-H 6048](#)) seeking \$500,000 for the URI Graduate School of Oceanography Center for Ocean Exploration, to support various projects and

scholarships for Rhode Island students.

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- **Senate, House finance committees hear governor's Medicaid reform plan**
Before packed committee rooms, both the House and Senate finance committees heard the governor's proposed Medicaid reform plan. The governor's proposal came from her Medicaid Working Group which was tasked with reforming the state's Medicaid system and aimed to identify over \$90 million in savings for the state.

- **Hemp bill heard in House HEW Committee**
House Judiciary Committee Chairman Cale P. Keable's (D-Dist. 47. Burrillville, Gloucester) legislation ([2015-H 6177](#)) concerning hemp was heard before the House Committee on Health, Education & Welfare this week. The bill would allow for the growth and sale of hemp, which comes from the same cannabis plant as marijuana, as an agricultural product subject to registration as cultivator with the Division of Agriculture, while sales, storage and growth of hemp products would be under the regulation of the Department of Health.

-30-

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