

April 29, 2016

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.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease>



- **Senate approves bill to make Henry Shelton Act more effective**  
The Senate approved legislation sponsored by Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) making it easier for struggling families, particularly those transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing, to earn forgiveness for utility debt. The legislation ([2016-S 2087A](#)) makes changes to the Henry Shelton Act, named after the longtime anti-poverty and social justice activist and founder of the George Wiley Center in Pawtucket, to allow people who enroll in the debt management plan to earn incremental forgiveness over the course of a year, instead of earning full forgiveness only if they successfully complete a three-year plan.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **House passes Canario bill for commission on new business startup process**  
The House of Representatives has passed legislation ([2016-H 7299](#)) introduced by Rep. Dennis M. Canario (D-Dist. 71, Portsmouth, Little Compton, Tiverton) to form a House legislative commission to study and provide recommendations for streamlining the new business startup process in Rhode Island. The purpose of the commission is to make a comprehensive study of the costs, fees, and procedures associated with starting a business in Rhode Island and to provide recommendations on ways to streamline the process.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate OKs bill regulating freestanding ERs**  
The Senate approved legislation ([2016-S 2696aa](#)) sponsored by Senate Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) to make a new type of health-care facility — freestanding emergency care centers — subject to the same regulatory requirements as other health-care

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facilities. The bill cannot be applied retroactively to two freestanding emergency rooms licensed earlier this month for sites in West Warwick and Bristol, but if it is enacted, would apply to any future proposals to open. Similar legislation ([2016-H 7500](#)) is sponsored in the House by Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick).

[Click here for Miller release.](#) [Click here for Serpa release.](#)

- **Senate passes DiPalma bill on graduation requirements for teens in state care**  
Sen. Louis P. DiPalma's (D-Dist. 12, Middletown, Newport, Little Compton, Tiverton) legislation ([2016-S 2572](#)) that requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to formulate rules and regulations regarding graduation requirements for public school students 14 years of age or older who are under the care and control of the state has passed the Senate. According to RI Kids Count, student mobility is associated with lower academic performance, social and psychological difficulties, lower levels of school engagement, and increased risk of dropping out of high school.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Rep. Coughlin introduces bill to eliminate the car tax by 2019**  
Rep. David A. Coughlin Jr. (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket) has introduced legislation ([2016-H 8070](#)) that would eliminate the motor vehicle and trailer excise tax by fiscal year 2019. In order to reimburse the state's cities and towns for the lost tax revenue, the legislation establishes that lost revenue would be made up from the state sales tax and lottery revenue. Currently, the tax exemption is \$500 of the vehicle's value, but, some communities provide additional exemption amounts for their residents.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Sen. Raptakis bill would shorten party disaffiliation period**  
Sen. Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-Dist. 33, Coventry, West Greenwich, East Greenwich) has introduced legislation ([2016-S 2311](#)) that would change the period of time a voter may have to change their party affiliation from the 90th day preceding any primary election for which the voter is eligible to the 29th day preceding any primary election for which the voter is eligible.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Rep. Azzinaro bill would create 'Dorian J. Murray Foundation' license plate**  
Rep. Samuel A. Azzinaro's (D-Dist. 37, Westerly) legislation ([2016-H 8008](#)) that authorizes the creation of a special license plate for the Dorian J. Murray Foundation was heard in the House Committee on Finance. As with other specialty plates, the Dorian J. Murray Foundation plate would include a \$40 issuance surcharge for those individuals ordering them, with \$20 of that going to the foundation and the other \$20 going to the state's general fund. A \$10 surcharge for annual renewal of the plates would go directly to the foundation.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Rep. Craven bill would allow police to cross municipal lines for traffic stops**  
Rep. Robert E. Craven's (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown) legislation ([2016-H 8064](#)) that amends the state's general laws to allow police officers to cross their municipal jurisdictions when in pursuit for a traffic violation was heard in the House Committee

on Judiciary. The legislation states that any police officer who enters another city or town in close pursuit of a person in order to stop them for a suspected traffic violation would be vested with all of the same authority as a member of the police department of the municipality where the traffic stop occurs.

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- **Ucci bill would allow recourse for those whose pets are intentionally killed**  
Rep. Stephen R. Ucci (D-Dist. 42, Johnston, Cranston) has filed legislation that would make it possible for someone to sue if someone else has caused the death of their pet, either intentionally or through negligence. The legislation ([2016-H 7605](#)) would allow someone to sue the perpetrator for up to \$5,000 of non-economic damages if his or her pet or companion animal is killed or sustains injuries that result in death as a result of that person's unlawful and intentional or negligent act. The bill would not apply to accidental deaths, such as unintentional automobile collisions that are not the result of negligence.  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
  
- **Bill would allow BCI checks for church volunteers, employees with child contact**  
Legislation ([2016-S 2716](#)) sponsored by Sen. Cynthia A. Coyne (D-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence) would protect Rhode Island youth by requiring all adults who seek employment or volunteer opportunities in churches or religious organizations with routine contact with children to submit to a national criminal background check if asked by the church or organization. The legislation would not force churches or religious organizations to make BCI checks a requirement, but would make them a tool they could use to protect children.  
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