

June 18, 2021

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>



- **House Finance Committee approves 2022 state budget bill**

The House Finance Committee approved a \$13.1 billion state budget for the 2022 fiscal year that boosts key supports for vulnerable Rhode Islanders — particularly affordable housing — without imposing any broad-based tax increases. The plan also fully funds K-12 education and boosts support for higher education, raises the tax exemption for forgivable Payroll Protection Plan loans to businesses to \$800,000 and restores funding to Eleanor Slater Hospital without any reorganization there at this time. The full House is scheduled to take up the bill ([2021-H 6122A](#)), which is sponsored by House Finance Committee Chairman Marvin L. Abney (D-Dist. 73, Newport, Middletown), Thursday.

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- **Budget bill funds first-of-its-kind statewide program for police body cameras**

Included in the budget bill that will be considered by the House Thursday is funding to make body cameras available for every uniformed patrol officer in the State Police and municipal departments statewide over the next 12 to 18 months. Sen. Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) and Rep. José F. Batista (D-Dist. 12, Providence), with the backing of Attorney General Peter F. Neronha, have introduced legislation ([2021-H 6463](#), [2021-S 0954](#)) to establish the program and parameters for use and release of video footage.

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- **House OKs bill granting immigrants in-state tuition rates at public colleges**

The House of Representatives approved legislation ([2021-H 5238](#)) introduced by Rep. Grace Diaz (D-Dist. 11, Providence) that would grant in-state tuition rates to all

More...

Rhode Islanders, regardless of immigration status. The measure now moves to the Senate for consideration.

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▪ **House passes bill to increase use of cleaner-burning biodiesel in home heating oil**

The House approved legislation ([2021-H 5132A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Deborah Ruggiero (D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown) to phase in significantly higher percentages of cleaner-burning biodiesel in home heating oil sold in the state. Biodiesel, a fuel made from vegetable oils such as used cooking oil and soy byproducts, is blended with petroleum heating oil to burn cleaner and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It requires no alteration to existing heating equipment, and is already blended at a 5% level in all home heating oil sold in Rhode Island. The legislation now goes to the Senate, where Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) is sponsoring a companion bill ([2021-S 0357](#)).

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▪ **Senate approves bill to remove spousal exemption from rape law**

The Senate approved legislation sponsored by Sen. Dawn Euer (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) to allow criminal charges to be brought when a person is raped by their spouse while the victim is incapacitated. The bill ([2021-S 0834](#)) eliminates the exemption for spouses in the part of state's first-degree sexual assault law that addresses situations when the victim is incapacitated, disabled or helpless. The legislation now goes to the House, where the House Judiciary Committee has recommended passage of companion legislation ([2021-H 6155](#)) sponsored by its chairman, Rep. Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown).

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▪ **Senate OKs bill lowering elder financial exploitation age**

The Senate marked World Elder Abuse Awareness Day by approving legislation ([2021-S 0670](#)) sponsored by Sen. Cynthia A. Coyne (D-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence) to lower from 65 to 60 the age at which a victim can be considered an elder under the state's elder financial exploitation law. The bill now goes to the House.

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▪ **House approves extension of time to transfer car registrations**

The House approved legislation sponsored by Rep. Michelle E. McGaw (D-Dist. 71, Portsmouth, Tiverton, Little Compton) to give car buyers more time to transfer their registrations. The bill ([2021-H 6274](#)), which now heads to the Senate, would extend the period of time that a newly purchased motor vehicle may be temporarily operated from 20 to 30 days, using the purchaser's current license plates.

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▪ **Senate OKs bill expanding Wavemaker program to STEM teachers**

The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0045](#)) introduced by Sen. Ryan W. Pearson (D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln) that would expand the Wavemaker Fellowship Program to include public school teachers in the high-need fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The measure now moves to the House of

Representatives for consideration.

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▪ **House OKs bill to allow image, likeness compensation for intercollegiate athletes**

The House of Representatives approved legislation ([2021-H 5082](#)) sponsored by Rep. Joseph J. Solomon Jr. (D-Dist. 22, Warwick) that would allow college athletes, while they are students, to personally profit from the use of their name, image and likeness, and would prohibit the National Collegiate Athletic Association from preventing these practices.

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▪ **Senate, House pass bills regulating, banning PFAS in water, food packaging**

The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0107A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Walter S. Felag, Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton) that mandates that the Department of Health establish maximum contaminate levels for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water. Rep. June S. Speakman (D-Dist. 69, Warren, Bristol) has sponsored the legislation ([2021-H 5523](#)) in the House. The House passed legislation ([2021-H 5356A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown) prohibiting PFAS from food packaging made or sold in Rhode Island. Sen. James A. Seveney (D-Dist. 11, Portsmouth, Bristol, Tiverton) has introduced the legislation ([2021-S 0110](#)) in the Senate.

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

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

**-30-**

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